The Doctrine of Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇas

by

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TO MY STUDENT, MY COLLEAGUE AND MY FRIEND, MR. LOUIS FINOT

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Sylvain Lévi's famed *La Doctrine Du Sacrifice Dans Les Brāhmaṇas* is no less significant today than it was when it first appeared in 1898. At a time when the study of the Brāhmaṇas was yet a nascent field (with limited access to this vast body of texts), Lévi's work included more than a thousand textual citations to the Brāhmaṇa corpus. At the same time, Lévi, among the many pioneering Indologists of his time, stood out for his recognition that the Brāhmaṇas were not composed from the "raving of madmen" (as the influential Indologist and Vedicist F. Max Müller had characterized them), but rather expressed—in Lévi's own words— "un système de thèologie net, logique, harmonieux" (a "neat, logical, and harmonious system of theology"), a view that is today widely accepted.

Lévi's volume includes his Brāhmaṇa translations in the body of the text, set off with quotation marks, with the Sanskrit text (in Roman transliteration) and citation placed in footnotes. For the sake of visual clarity, I have placed the translated Brāhmaṇa passages (unless they are embodied as an element of Lévi's discussion) in indented sections, with the textual references following each passage. Given the wide availability of the Brāhmaṇas (in particular, through electronic resources), I have not included the Sanskrit texts in this volume. (Lévi's discursive footnotes, however, remain.) Also, differing from Lévi's volume, I have included an appendix listing all the Brāhmaṇa passages that Lévi cites, organized alphabetically by chapter. The index, however, is reproduced from Lévi's volume. And, because this translation is intended to be published as an "ebook," allowing for searchable keywords, page number have been excluded from the index.

For the most part, I have translated directly from Lévi's French translations of Brāhmaṇa passages (which he translated from Sanskrit into French) even when they do not agree with the "standard" English translations (e.g., Eggeling's famed five-volume English translation of the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, which appeared in the Sacred Books of the East Series*)*. Upon the rare occasion that a passage seemed overly obscure to me, I have retranslated from the Sanskrit text. Other conventions adopted in this translation, which differ from Lévi's work are: avoiding anglicized plurals of Sanskrit words (e.g., "*paśu*(s)"), but not for Sanskrit terms used regularly in English ("asuras"); only capitalizing patronymic names and not the names of other groups (e.g., "Āditya" but not "asura"). Throughout the translation, there are a few added translator's notes (in the footnotes, and denoted as "Tr. Note"). Finally, the system of transliteration used by Lévi is now obsolete; I have "updated" all transliterated Sanskrit words following the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration.

Princeton, NJ, 2025

FOREWORD

Formed from the lessons I taught during the academic year 1896-1897, written on the eve of a long journey, and printed in my absence, this book has not had the benefit of slow maturation or a final revision. Pressed by circumstances, I had to choose between abandoning it definitively or publishing it hastily. After the long and arduous efforts I had spent gathering these materials, I allowed myself to believe that others might benefit from the work done. The perhaps overly indulgent approval of a few friends convinced me. The often-proven and always ready dedication of Mr. Finot ensured the material correction of the work; Mr. Foucher, barely returned from India, kindly assisted him. The multitude of texts cited in transcription speaks volumes about the gratitude I owe to these two collaborators. I also thank the section of Religious Sciences, which so generously admitted into its library a work born outside its domain.

Saigon, April 6, 1898.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SOURCES

Editions of Brāhmaṇa-texts

AB	Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa, ed. T. Aufrecht (Bonn, 1879; cited by adhyāya and khaṇḍa).
GB	Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa, ed. R. Mitra (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, 1872).
JB	Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa (frag.), ed. H. Oertel (Journal of the American Oriental Society [JAOS] XV, 233-51; XVIII, 15-18).
Kāṭh	Kāṭhaka (fragments), ed. A. Weber (Indische Studien III, 451-479).
KB	Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa, ed. B. Lindner (Jena, 1887).
MS	Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā, ed. L. von Schroeder (Leipzig, 1881-1886).
ṢaḍvB	Ṣaḍviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa, Prapāṭhaka I, ed. K. Klemm (Gütersloh, 1891).
SāmavidhB	Sāmavidhāna-Brāhmaṇa, ed. A. C. Burnell (London, 1873).
ŚB	Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, ed. A. Weber (Berlin, 1855).
TB	Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa, ed. R. Mitra (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, 1855-1890).
TS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā, ed. A. Weber (Indische Studien XI & XII).
TMB	Tāṇḍya-Mahā-Brāhmaṇa, ed. A. Vedantavagica (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, 1869-1871).

Other Sanskrit Texts and Sources

BhāgP	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
BĀU	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad
OST	J. Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts (London, 1858-70).

Translator's Notes

HIL	Gonda, J. 1975. A History of Indian Literature: Vedic Literature (Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas), Vol 1, Fasc 1 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz).

HSR Peterson, P. 1890. Handbook to the Study of the Rigveda (Bombay: Government Central Book Depot).

OPH Colebrooke, H. T. 1827. "On the Philosophy of the Hindus, Part III." Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland I: 439-61.

PMS Jha, G. 1970. Pūrva Mimāmsā Sūtra of Jaimini (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House).

INTRODUCTION

Western scholarship too often designates as "Vedic religion" the interpretative systems based either on the hymns of the Ṛg-Veda or on the entire collection of Vedic hymns. Brahmanical orthodoxy, however, gives a broader sense to the term Veda: "The mantras and the Brāhmaṇas together constitute the Veda." The mantras are generally the formulas that accompany rituals; the hymns fall into this category and constitute its largest part. "Everything that does not fall under the category of mantra is Brāhmaṇa."[1] The very name Brāhmaṇa indicates the essential nature of these works; they deal with *bráhman*, sacred knowledge. Commentators recognize two types of Brāhmaṇas: some contain prescriptions (*vidhi*), while others provide explanations (*arthavāda*). Their meticulous and laborious efforts have produced a catalog of subjects covered in the Brāhmaṇas. These texts teach the origins of rituals (*hetu*), the etymology of words (*nirvacana*), the critique of condemned actions (*nindā*), the praise of virtues (*praśaṃsā*), the discussion of doubtful matters (*sasṃśaya*), the prescriptions to be followed (*vidhi*), variations in practice (*parakṛti*), ancient customs (*purākalpa*), and particularities of specific circumstances (*viśeṣavadhāraṇakalpanā*). This list does not exhaust all topics covered, but it illustrates both their diversity and their common character. The Brāhmaṇas consist of the observations of scholars well-versed in sacred knowledge (*brahmavādino vadanti*). The texts of Vedic literature allow us to trace, step by step, the evolution of the Brāhmaṇas: the schools of the Black Yajur-Veda preserved both the mantras and the Brāhmaṇas within a single collection; intended for priests responsible for ritual manipulations, their compilations were structured around rites. Without imposing a logical order or adopting a uniform framework, they follow a meandering and sometimes fanciful course, selecting a number of essential or typical sacrifices, specifying the formulas to be known, and then indicate their rationale or practical application. The Brāhmaṇa remains inseparable from the Saṃhitā, with each group of formulas followed by the necessary explanatory remarks. By contrast, the White Yajur-Veda separated the Brāhmaṇas from the Saṃhitā; gathering all the formulas in one place and all the exegesis in another. Despite this separation, the two elements as a regular matter remain in agreement. The Brāhmaṇa follows the structure of the Saṃhitā and scrupulously respects the order of the verses. The Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛg-Veda and the Sāma-Veda did not need to adhere to the same

[1] [Tr. Note: These well-known statements likely refer to Sayaṇa's commentary to the Ṛg-Veda; see, HSR, 169-73 (also known from the Pūrva Mimāmsā Sūtra; see PMS, 163-64, the Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra [2.6], and numerous Vedic commentaries); the notion that the Veda consists of Mantra and Brāhmaṇa is deeply embedded in Western Indology, expressed in Colebrook's seminal work "On the Philosophy of the Hindus" (OPH, 448).]

constraints. The roles of the reciter and the chanter, however complex, did not impose the same level of initiative or detailed knowledge. While not disconnected from ritual practice, their Saṃhitās had paid little attention to it when they were first compiled. Since the Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛg-Veda and the Sāma-Veda were inherently dependent on ritual, they freed themselves from the structure of their respective Saṃhitās and followed their own paths. In this way, the Brāhmaṇas gained autonomy and formed a distinct class of works. Schools that had initially merged formulas and traditional exegesis into a single compilation later benefited from this new model, using it to correct gaps or omissions: the Taittirīya-Veda school supplemented its already completed Saṃhitā by adding an independent Brāhmaṇa. As we have received them, the Brāhmaṇas in general still bear the clear traces of their gradual formation. The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa consists of fourteen books in total. The first nine (except for an expected exception at the beginning) are strictly parallel to the Saṃhitā; the last five diverge or return to it intermittently, replacing continuous exposition with repetitions, recapitulations, and mystical speculations. These books seem to form a distinct group, and indeed, Book XII is specifically titled *madhyama*, "the central," a designation that only makes sense if Book X marks the beginning of a separate compilation, which concludes in Book XIV. Within Books I-IX, the first five stand out from the remaining four: Yājñavalkya is cited as the supreme authority in the earlier books; Śāṇḍilya occupies the same place in the later sections. If one studies the variations of one of the characteristic formulas that run throughout the entire Brāhmaṇa (such as the struggle between the gods and the asuras, for example), the classification of these divergences yields identical results. However, the compiler of the final work managed to give it an appearance of unity by inserting cross-references here and there, which either recall previously discussed topics or foreshadow future developments. The keen criticism of Mr. Weber has been applied with the same success to the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa; the last sixteen *adhyāya*(s) of the work clearly bear the mark of a secondary origin. The collections of the Black Yajur-Veda distinctly reveal the revisions they have undergone: the Kāṭhaka is divided into five parts, with the first three bearing, —barely concealed under phonetic alterations—the designations of "initial" (*iṭhimikā*), "middle" (*madhyamikā*), "final" (*orimikā*). Among the four sections of the Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā, the second is called "central" (*madhyama*), while the fourth is titled, "The Supplement" (*khila*). The process of revision appears even more clearly in the Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa, which reworks material from the Aitareya, and especially in the Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa, which openly borrows from the Śatapatha, Aitareya, Maitrāyaṇī, and no doubt other collections as well.

Even if the internal chronology of the Brāhmaṇas can be reconstructed with a fair degree of plausibility, exact dates entirely elude research. The results based on the examination of astronomical data offer only an illusory certainty and ultimately reflect unspoken or

unconscious biases. The names of places and people, however intriguing they may be, are not sufficient to establish history. The safest approach is to rely on a relative chronology: the Brāhmaṇas follow the hymns and precede Buddhism. Language, vocabulary, ideas, and facts all point to the same conclusion. What is the time interval that separates these three stages? Imagination is free to extend or shorten it at will. It is enough for us to know—and on this point, opinions are unanimous—that among all the monuments of Indian literature, the Brāhmaṇas are the closest to the Vedic hymns. Whether near or distant in time, the scholars of the Brāhmaṇas are the only true successors of the inspired poets; however corrupted one may suppose them to be, their religious system is continuously linked by tradition to the authors of the hymns. But common opinion in the West has drawn such a deep dividing line between the two branches of Vedic literature that, as a precaution, I have refrained from crossing it. As so many others have done with the hymns, I have attempted to consider the Brāhmaṇas in isolation and to compile a doctrinal inventory of them. I have limited my research to published texts or fragments; their number is considerable enough, and their character varied enough, to dispense with relying on unpublished materials. The nature of the Brāhmaṇas, as I have briefly indicated, determined the method to be followed. The Brāhmaṇas do not consist of a didactic exposition, much less a systematic one; stemming from priestly conversations and debates, gathered from various schools and brotherhoods, the Brāhmaṇas are anonymous collections of individual opinions, independent aphorisms, and free discussions attached to the explanation of rites. At first glance, it seems bold to attempt to unify scattered formulas, lacking an acknowledged origin, into a coherent body of doctrine. However, as soon as one compares the Brāhmaṇas, one is struck by their fundamental unity: a common treasury of aphorisms, maxims, anecdotes, and legends circulated among the priestly clans, endowed by tradition with canonical authority. Each of the great schools that adopted it unconsciously adapted it to its own particular genius, brutish among the followers of the Black Yajur-Veda, artistic and subtle among those of the White Yajur-Veda, enchanted by the marvelous among those of the Sāma-Veda, harmonious and refined among those of the Ṛg-Veda. Yet, everywhere the original source remains strongly apparent beneath the revisions. A concordance of the Brāhmaṇas is one of the indispensable tools of Vedic philology, and the outline I have drawn demonstrates the ease of such an endeavor. To assign the documents I have used their real value, I had to strive to multiply the sources of testimony. If the agreement is found in texts that do not belong to the same Veda, regardless of their number, the doctrine expressed has the right to be considered the official doctrine of brāhmanism. If parallel passages appear only within a single Veda, no matter how many schools it comprises, the doctrine applies only to that specific Veda. Finally, if no concordances are found at all, the significance of the text must remain undetermined. To avoid overloading the exposition with cumbersome excess, I have always

been content to translate only one of the texts cited in concordance. However, I deemed it necessary to reproduce the originals in full, ensuring the reader a quick means of verification, one that, without this aid, would often be impractical. More importantly, I believe I am providing future scholars with the materials for a study I would have liked to pursue further. By comparing in detail the episodes or developments common to multiple Brāhmaṇas, it would be easy to highlight the distinctive features of each collection: transmission methods, grammar, lexicon, inspiration, and system. The strong individuality of all these ancient texts would emerge from the thick haze in which indifference has long obscured them.

At first glance, the composition of the Brāhmaṇas might appear to be a limited collection of selected passages, nothing more than a disjointed assemblage of curiosities, cut from various texts without regard for their surrounding context. There is a striking surprise as soon as one brings them together. A neat, logical, and harmonious system of theology spontaneously emerges from the assembled materials and gives them coherence. While it may not reflect the religious sentiment of Brahmanism in its noblest form, it at least attests to its natural aptitude for speculation. Morality finds no place in this system; the sacrifice, which regulates the relationship between humans and deities, is a mechanical operation that acts through its intrinsic energy. Hidden within nature, it is only released through the priest's magical action. The anxious and malevolent gods are forced to capitulate, overcome and subdued by the very force that granted them their greatness. Despite their opposition, the sacrificer ascends to the celestial world and secures a definitive place for the future: man becomes superhuman. Yet, though the gain is considerable, the game is a delicate one. Once unleashed, the power of sacrifice acts blindly; those who fail to control it are crushed by it, and the ever-watchful jealousy of the gods readily steps in to complete the destruction. Experts in rituals, the gods, when threatened, are quick to exploit errors to defend their positions. Those who defend an "aryan Bible," privileged to enjoy the freshness and naiveté of the hymns, are free to imagine a long and profound decline in religious sentiment between the poets and the theologians of Vedic religion. Others, however, may refuse to accept such a surprising evolution in beliefs and doctrines, where a stage of crude barbarism follows an era of exquisite refinement. In truth, it is difficult to conceive of anything more brutal and materialistic than the theology of the Brāhmaṇas. Concepts that time and practice have gradually refined, imbuing them with a moral aspect, surprise us with their raw realism. Sacrifice is a magical operation: the initiation, which regenerates, is a faithful reproduction of conception, gestation, and birth. Faith is merely confidence in the power of rituals; ascension to heaven occurs in successive stages; the good is ritual exactitude. Such a crude religion presupposes a semi-barbaric people. Yet the sorcerers, magicians, or shamans of these tribes managed to analyze their system, dismantle its components, study its mechanisms, observe its principles, and establish its laws: they are

the true fathers of Indian philosophy. They not only shaped and refined an instrument for metaphysical conquest but also laid the solid foundations of classical philosophies. Tradition is correct in directly linking the Upaniṣads to the Brāhmaṇas; one naturally emerged from the other. The *brahman* of the Brāhmaṇas is the *brahman* of the Upaniṣads; sacred knowledge is identical to its object—the sacrifice—and the sacrifice is the sole reality. It is both the creator and the creation; all phenomena in the universe are mere reflections of it, borrowing their semblance of existence from it. It is no idle fantasy that leads the theologians of the Brāhmaṇas to repeatedly proclaim the identity between ritual elements and parts of the universe: the syllables of a meter represent the seasons; the details of the sacred fire represent the organs of the human body; the number of oblations represents the months. Furthermore, the same terms combine into different equations, and from one identity to another, the whole system ultimately reduces to a single equation. The formula, "Worship reality under the name of *brahman*" (ŚB 10.6.3.1), expresses the spirit of both the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. Speculations on sacrifice not only led the Hindu intellect to recognize the existence of a single being as a fundamental doctrine, but they may have also introduced the idea of transmigration. The Brāhmaṇas do not explicitly mention the successive existences of a human being; the idea of repeated death appears only as a contrast to the infinite life of celestial beings. Yet, the eternity of sacrifice is divided into an infinite number of periods. Whoever offers it, kills it, and each death brings about its revival. The Supreme Male, the quintessential Man (*puruṣa*), dies and is reborn endlessly. The cycle of his transmigrations aligns with the famous definition: its center is everywhere, its circumference nowhere. His destiny inevitably came to be regarded as the ideal model of human existence. Sacrifice shaped man in its own image.

Forerunners of both great heresies and great orthodox systems, the Brāhmaṇas anticipate and announce them alike. Through them, gaps are filled, and the continuity of religious phenomena becomes evident. If Buddhism and Jainism arose as reactions against the arid doctrines of the priestly tradition, both still borrowed a portion of their material from it. The "seer" who discovers solely through the power of his intellect, without divine assistance and often against the will of the gods, the ritual or formula that ensures success, is the immediate precursor of the Buddhas and the Jinas, who, through direct intuition and spontaneous illumination, discover the path to salvation. It is no coincidence that the sacred terms *arhat* and *buddha* already appear in the Brāhmaṇas; even the very doctrines they symbolize exist there in embryonic form, ready to emerge. The brahmanism of the Brāhmaṇas is so undeniably the precursor of Buddhism that it even bequeathed it an unfortunate heritage: the return to Rudra-Śiva, the mechanical recitation of mantras, and the absurd or shocking formalism of the Tantras are the chronic relapses that attest to this undeniable lineage.

I — THE GOD OF THE SACRIFICE: PRAJĀPATI

Among all the deities of the Brāhmaṇas, the highest god is Prajāpati, the "lord of creatures." He is the primordial being; in the beginning, nothing existed in the universe except him (ŚB 2.2.4.1; ŚB 7.5.2.6; AB 10.1.5; TMB 16.1.1; MS 1.8.4; MS 4.2.3). Some accounts, however, seemingly different, recount the birth of the god and his lineage. At times, he is considered a secondary creation of the ṛṣis:

> In the beginning, the universe was non-being. If one asks: "What was this non-being?" "It was the ṛṣis; they were, at the beginning, the non-being." If one asks: "What were these ṛṣis?" "They were the breaths." Because, before all that exists, having desired it, they exhausted themselves in effort and mortification, they are the ṛṣis...Inflamed, they emitted seven males separately. They said: "As long as we remain thus, we will not be able to procreate; let us make one male out of the seven." From the seven males, they made one male. From the region above the navel, they gathered two; from below, two; one became the side, another the other side, one the support point. Then the nobility and the essence of these seven males were concentrated at the very top: this became the head...This male became Prajāpati." (ŚB 6.1.1.1-5)

At other times, the spirit, emerging from non-being, in turn, emits him:

> In the beginning, truly, this universe was nothingness; the sky did not exist, nor the earth, nor the atmosphere. The non-being, which alone existed, then became spirit,[2] saying: "I want to be!" He heated himself; as he heated himself, smoke was born from him. He heated himself again, and as he heated himself, fire was born. He heated himself again, and as he heated himself, light was born. He heated himself again, and as he heated himself, radiance was born. He heated himself again, and as he heated himself, rays were born. He heated himself again, and as he heated himself, meteors were born. Then the sky was in confusion. He split the bladder, and the ocean was formed...Then the *daśahotar* was emitted afterward; the *daśahotar* is Prajāpati...From non-being, the spirit was emitted; the spirit emitted Prajāpati; Prajāpati emitted beings. (TB 2.2.9.1-10)

At times, he emerged from the waters, hatched from a golden egg:

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[2] [Tr. Note: Lévi translates the Sanskrit manas as "l'esprit," which I have taken in the literal sense of "spirit"; although, manas is more typically translated into English as "mind," it is not a violation of its fundamental meaning to present it as "spirit," as it captures the sense of manas as expressing some element of incorporeal consciousness, that is the human "spirit."]

> In the beginning, truly, there was only water; everything was fluid. The waters had a desire: "How could we procreate?" They labored, they heated themselves (practiced austerities), and as they heated themselves, a golden egg was born. It was the year (time) that had just been born. This golden egg floated here and there for the duration of a year. Then, within the year, a male was formed—this was Prajāpati. (ŚB 11.1.6.1)

The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, which exclusively aims to glorify the Atharvaṇas, deliberately confuses Prajāpati with Atharvan and gives him Brahma as his father (GB 1.1.4). According to the Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa, Brahma and the Brahman appeared before Prajāpati:

> In the beginning, truly, there was only the Brahman; as the essence of its vigor overflowed, it became Brahma. Brahma meditated in silence with his mind; his mind became Prajāpati. (SāmavidhB 1.1-3; cf., ŚB 11.2.3.1)

The apparent contradiction in these texts does not prevent us from recognizing a real unity in them; the same concept is expressed in different ways. Prajāpati is the sacrifice; the two terms are identical, and the Brāhmaṇas unanimously and tirelessly repeat this (ŚB 1.7.4.4; MS 3.6.5; AB 7.7.2; GB 2.2.18).[3] The sacrifice, like Prajāpati, is anterior to all beings since they could not exist without it. It is also born from the breaths or from the spirit, for it is spiritual in essence, and its lineage can also be represented as a simple equivalence: "Prajāpati is the spirit" or "Prajāpati is like the spirit" (SāmavidhB 1.1.4; TS 2.5.11.5). He is also the son of the waters because the waters are the principle of ritual purity; or the son of the Brahman, the sacred formula, because the rite is inseparable from the liturgy. Prajāpati is one as well as the other:

> Prajāpati has the hymns as his limbs; Prajāpati is the one who sacrifices. (AB 7.8.2)
>
> Prajāpati is all the sacred formulas. (ŚB 7.3.1.42).

[3] Another deity also represents the sacrifice; it is Viṣṇu (ŚB 1.1.2.13; MS 1.4.14; TB 1.2.5.1; TMB 9.7.10; AB 3.4.4). The legend of the dwarf with three steps, later incorporated into Viṣṇu's classical avatars, is already associated with this god's name in the Brāhmaṇas (see OST IV, 122); however, the boar avatar, which appeared to lift the earth from the ocean, is attributed there to Prajāpati (see OST IV, 27 ff.). The fundamental equivalence of the two figures allowed the same legend to be transferred from one to the other without difficulty.

Prajāpati is often confused with the year, that is to say, with time, because the year is his image (AB 7.7.2; ŚB 1.2.5.13; ŚB 11.1.6.13; KB 6.15); as he is the year, he is the male; for, just like the year, the male who sacrifices gives the sacrifice its measure (ŚB 10.2.1.2; TS 5.2.5.1).[4]

Prajāpati, depending on whether one considers the sacrifice in its manifestations or in its essence, is "defined and undefined at the same time," or simply "undefined" (ŚB 7.2.4.30; ŚB 1.1.1.13; similarly, MS 3.9.6; AB 29.4.18; TMB 7.8.3). Likewise, from the same perspective, he is both "limited and unlimited" or simply "unlimited" (ŚB 7.2.4.30; GB 2.1.7). Similarly, he is either "one" (MS 1.8.4) or composed of parts; sometimes he is formed by the combination of the seven males created by the ṛṣis (ŚB 6.4.1.1.1-5; ŚB 10.2.3.18; cf., ŚB 10.2.2.1); sometimes, and this is the most frequent case, he is made up of seventeen elements (ŚB 1.5.2.17; similarly, AB 1.1.14; GB 2.1.19; TS 1.6.11.1; MS 1.11.6). This can refer either to the seventeen syllables of the regular formulas that accompany the offering, the seventeen organs of the male, or the total of the months and seasons that make up the year.[5]

One of the most common appellations of Prajāpati perfectly expresses his "undefined" nature: he is referred to by the interrogative pronoun *ka*, meaning "who?":

> Prajāpati, who is he? (TMB 7.8.3; AB 12.10.1; TS 1.7.6.6; ŚB 4.5.6.4)

A legend explains the origin of this name:

> After Vṛtra was slain, the triumphant Indra spoke to Prajāpati: "I want to be what you are, I want to be great!" Prajāpati replied, "And I, then, who will I be?' Indra answered, "You will be what you have said." And thus, Prajāpati received the name "Who?" (AB 12.10.1)[6]

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[4] Prajāpati is also sporadically identified with Mṛtyu (ŚB 10.4.3.3); with Savitar (ŚB 12.3.5.1); with Candramas and with Mahatdeva (ŚB 6.1.3.16).

[5] The five formulas are: *o śrāvaya* | *astu śrauṣat* | *yaja* | *ye yajāmahe* | *vauṣat* (ŚB 1.5.2.17; TS 1.6.11.1; cf. KB 16.4). The organs are the: arms, legs, head, *ātman*, speech, and the ten breaths (MS 1.11.6.; ŚB 10.4.1.17 gives another analysis: *loman* (hair); *tuac* (skin); *asṛg* (blood); *medas* (fat); *māṃsa* (flesh); *snāvan* (muscle); *asthi* (bone); *majjā* (marrow) make up the sixteen syllables, and the breath (*prāṇa*) complete the number seventeen. The year has twelve months and five seasons (ŚB 8.4.1.11; AB 1.1.14). Prajāpati is designated as having twenty-four parts (*caturviṃśa*) (GB. 2.1.26).

[6] The account in the TB (TB 2.2.10.1-2) presents the dialogue differently: "Prajāpati created Indra as the youngest of the gods and sent him to rule over them as their sovereign. The gods said to him, 'Who are you? We are greater than you.' Indra reported the words of the gods to Prajāpati. Now, at that time,

Prajapati is made of gold; "he ultimately fashioned himself into a gold form" (ŚB 10.1.4.9). In other words, he became immortal, for "gold is immortality" (MS 2.2.2; likewise, ŚB 3.8.2.27; AB 7.4.6). But at first, he was mortal, like the other gods.

> One half of Prajapati was mortal, one half was immortal; and because he was partly mortal, he feared death...He had five mortal elements in his body: hair, skin, flesh, bones, marrow. The immortal elements were: mind, speech, breath, sight, hearing. (ŚB 10.1.3.2-7)

The gods, through the ritual, freed him from death.

A single emotion drives Prajāpati to create: "the desire for offspring, the need to multiply" (ŚB 6.1.1.8; TB 2.2.9.5; TS 7.1.1.4; TMB 6.5.1; AB 10.1.5). The act of creation is generally expressed by the verb *sarj*, meaning "to emit," used in the middle voice (see examples cited below), and sometimes by the verb *nir-mā*, meaning "to construct," also in the middle voice (ŚB 7.5.2.6; TS 7.1.1.4; TMB 6.1.6; TB 2.1.7.4; GB 1.2.16). Most often, Prajāpati directly emits from his own body, limb by limb, organ by organ, the various categories of creatures.

> Prajāpati desired to procreate; from his face, he formed the *trivṛt*; the deity Agni was emitted afterward, along with the *gāyatrī* meter, the *rathaṃtara sāman*, the Brahmin among men, and the goat among animals; from his chest and arms, he formed the *pañcadaśa*...from his waist, the *saptadaśa*...from his feet, the *ekaviṃśa*. (TS 7.1.1.4; TMB 6.1.6-12)

Each act is followed respectively by a corresponding hierarchical series of creations:

> His head became the sky, his chest the atmosphere, his waist the ocean, and his feet the earth; it is he who emitted everything that exists in the universe. (SāmavidhB 1.1.5)

> His left eye swelled, and drops fell from it; these became the rain; twenty-one drops fell, and the wind scattered them from there for the well-being of creatures. His pupil fell, and it became the barley grain. (MS 4.6.3; cf., TS 6.4.10.5)[7]

Prajāpati possessed the radiance that is in the sun. Indra said to him, 'Give it to me, and then I will be the sovereign of these gods.' Prajāpati replied, 'And if I give it to you, then who will I be?' Indra answered, 'You will be what you have said.' Thus, Prajāpati is named Ka ('Who')."

[7] Prajāpati's swollen eye is a familiar theme in the Brāhmaṇas. A fanciful etymology (*aśvayat*, "it swelled"; *aśva*, "horse") links this episode to the origin of the horse (See ŚB 13.3.1.1; TS 5.3.12.1; TB 1.1.5.4; etc.). The origin of animal species, plants, minerals, and meteorological phenomena frequently serves as a theme for the imaginative narratives of the Brāhmaṇas. A useful overview may be gleaned

He emitted:

> From his superior breaths came the gods, from his inferior breaths came mortal creatures. (ŚB 10.1.3.1)
>
> From his person came Āditya. (TB 2.1.7.4; TB 1.7.1.4)
>
> From his breaths came the animals, from his mind came man, from his eye came the horse, from his breath came the cow, from his hearing came the sheep, from his speech came the goat. (ŚB 7.5.2.6)

Sometimes, just as he emerged from an egg, he brings creation forth from an egg. Thus, after two failed attempts, he wonders how to embark on another creation.

> Then his vigor expanded outside of him and became an egg; he divided it, he nourished it, and creatures were born from it. (TB 1.6.2.4)

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from extual samples, albeit incomplete. For example, the birth of the porcupine, cow, and various snakes (*dundubha*, *svaja*, *andhāhi*) from the arrow of Kṛśānu (AB 13.2.3); the black and white animals (buffalo, camels, donkeys, etc.) were created from Prajāpati's semen (AB 13.10.1 ff.); the goat, sheep, ram, bull, horse, mule, donkey, falcon, etc., were created by Indra, intoxicated with Soma (ŚB 12.7.1.2-9); wild beasts originated from Viśvarūpa's heads (ŚB 5.5.4.2 ff.); the donkey emerged from ashes (ŚB 4.5.1.9); numerous animals were born from an exhausted Prajāpati (ŚB 3.2.3.9; ŚB 3.2.4.1-15); the ram came from Prajāpati's semen (ŚB 6.2.2.6); the horse originated from the sacrifice (AB 11.11.3) and from Prajāpati's swollen eye (ŚB 13.3.1.1; TB 1.1.5.4; TS 5.3.12.1) or from the waters (ŚB 5.1.4.5); the elephant was born from the embryo of Aditi (ŚB 3.1.3.4); frogs originated from water droplets (ŚB 9.1.2.21); the wild boar was created from a pot of melted butter (ŚB 5.4.3.19); the turtle came from the vital sap of the three worlds (ŚB 7.5.1.1); the numerous plants (*godhūma*, *kuvala*, *upavākā*, *badara*, etc.) were born from Indra, intoxicated with Soma (ŚB 12.7.1.2-9); numerous trees emerged from an engorged Prajāpati (ŚB 13.4.4.6 ff.); the *udumbara*, *aśvattha*, and *plakṣa* trees originated from *ūrj*, *tejas,* and *yaśas* (AB 35.6.1 ff.); the *darbha* plant came from foaming waters (ŚB 7.2.3.2; TB 3.2.5.1); the *dūrvā* grass was formed from Prajāpati's hair (ŚB 7.4.2.12); the *kārṣmarya* tree came from Prajāpati's *tejas* (ŚB 7.4.1.37); the *puṇḍarīka* was born from *dīkṣā* and *tapas* (TB 1.8.2.1); the *nyagrodha* tree came from the gods' Soma cups (AB 35.4.3); the *palāśa* tree originated from a feather of the *gāyatrī* meter (ŚB 1.7.1.1); the *udumbara* tree was born from *ūrj* (AB 24.5.4; AB 35.6.1; TB 1.1.3.10); silver originated from tears (TS 1.5.12); gold was born from Agni's semen (ŚB 2.1.1.5; ŚB 3.9.4.1; TB 1.1.3.8); salt was formed from the essence of heaven and earth (ŚB 2.1.1.6; TB 1.1.3.2); night was created to console Yamī (MS 1.5.12); the seasons were connected with the sensory organs (ŚB 8.1.1.8; ŚB 2.2.5.8); the lute (*vīṇā*) was created to seduce Vāc (ŚB 3.2.4.6). Several of the passages mentioned here are cited throughout this work.

And, again, desiring to procreate:

> He entered the waters with the triple knowledge. An egg developed. He caressed it, saying: "Let it be! Let it multiply!" And the Brahman was born from it. (ŚB 6.1.1.10)

To continue the work of creation, Prajāpati repeats the same gesture, accompanying it with various formulas:

> Let it grow, let it multiply! Bring glory! Bring the seed! (ŚB 6.1.2.1-4)

The act of creation is also represented as a coupling.

> Through Agni, Prajāpati coupled with the earth...through Vāyu, he coupled with the atmosphere...through Āditya, he coupled with the sky...through the spirit, he coupled with speech. (ŚB 6.1.2.1-6)

However, as the father of creatures, Prajāpati cannot couple without committing incest. The Brāhmaṇas find pleasure in recounting the crime of their god with their customary indifference; it is said:

> Prajāpati desired to possess his own daughter, whether it be Dyaus or Uṣas (the sky or the dawn). "I want to couple with her," he said to himself, and he did so. The gods considered this a fault: "It is he," they said, "who treats his daughter, our sister, in this way." The gods said to the god who rules over cattle: "Truly, he commits a transgression, he who treats his daughter, our sister, in this way; pierce him." Rudra took aim and pierced him; half of his seed fell...When the wrath of the gods subsided, they healed Prajāpati and removed the dart from him. (ŚB 1.7.4.1-4; cf., ŚB 6.1.3.8; AB 13.9; MS 4.2.12; TMB 8.2.10)

The details vary from one text to another; the daughter of Prajāpati, for example, transforms into a doe to escape her father's sinful passion; he immediately changes into a stag. The Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa, which often stands out for its moral tendency, does not dare to eliminate the traditional incest but transfers it from Prajāpati to his sons:

> Prajāpati, desiring offspring, practiced intense austerities; as he heated up, five were born: Agni, Vāyu, Aditya, Candramas, and Uṣas, the fifth. He said to them: "You too, practice austerities." They underwent initiation for the sacrifice, and as they performed the ceremony and became heated. Uṣas, the daughter of Prajāpati, took the form of an Apsaras and appeared before them. Their minds immediately turned toward her. They released their seed. They went to their father, Prajapati, and said: "We have released our seed, let it not be lost." Prajapati made a golden cup and poured the seed into it. (KB 6.1)

Prajāpati, the sacrifice, naturally has Vāc, speech, as an auxiliary, since the ritual is inseparable from the formula. Sometimes, he couples with her:

> Prajāpati was the universe; Vāc was his second; he coupled with her, she conceived, she separated from him, she emitted the creatures, then she returned into Prajāpati. (Kāṭh 12.5; Kāṭh 27.1 [*Indische Studien* IX: 477])

Sometimes, it is simply a collaboration:

> Prajāpati desired to multiply and create offspring; he contemplated in silence with his mind; what was in his mind became the *bṛhat* (*sāman*). He thought: "Here I am carrying an embryo within me; I want to procreate it through Vāc"; he emitted Vāc. (TMB 7.6.1.3)

> In the beginning, Prajāpati was the universe. He wanted to procreate, to multiply. He practiced austerities, he held back Vāc (speech); after a year, he spoke twelve times...he uttered this formula, and all beings were then brought forth. (AB 10.1.5; ŚB 11.1.6.3)

> It is from the voice, their dwelling place, that Prajāpati emitted the waters; for Vāc belonged to him; she was emitted and filled the universe. (ŚB 6.1.1.9)

Instead of an undefined Vāc, precise formulas are sometimes the agents of creation:

> After a year, Prajāpati wanted to speak; he said '*bhūr*,' and the earth came to be, he said '*bhuvaḥ*,' and space came to be, he said '*svaḥ*,' and the sky came to be. (ŚB 11.1.6.3)

The grammatical knowledge of the Brāhmaṇas finds a fitting opportunity to manifest itself in relation to the creative word. The three worlds correspond in their origin to the three categories of sounds: vowels, consonants, and spirants:

> Prajāpati alone was the entire universe; Vāc belonged to him, Vāc was his second. He considered: "This Vāc, I want to emit her; she will go on transforming infinitely into all things." He emitted Vāc, and she went on transforming into all things; she, who was at the highest, she developed like a drop of water expands. Prajapati cut a third: *a*, and it became the earth...He cut another third: *ka*, and it became the atmosphere...He cast the third upward: *ho*, and it became the sky...He divided Vāc, which was a single syllable, into three. (TMB 20.14.2-5)

Prajāpati, struggling with creation, resorted once again to *tapas*, the burning radiance that emanates from a body mortified by asceticism, just as *pratāpa* radiates from the royal person (cf., TB 2.2.9.1; ŚB 11.1.6.1; KB 6.1; AB 10.1.5); often, he combined *tapas* with *śrama*, the laborious effort of practicing all prescribed observances. Expert in the rites, he knows how to employ each for its proper function: using the *vaiṣvadeva*, he emits creatures; using the *daṣahotar*, he

multiplied himself; using the *atirātra*, he created day and night (TB 1.6.2.1; ŚB 2.5.2.1; MS 1.9.3; TMB 4.1.4). Taken as a whole, the rites and formulas are the matrix from which he emits creatures (MS 4.7.4). Even the internal contemplation of sacrifice—when Prajāpati withdraws into himself—is strong enough to create (TMB 7.6.1; MS 4.2.1)

The sacrifice that has achieved its goal is exhausted; Prajāpati, his work completed, falls apart; the help of the gods, the celestial sacrificers, is essential to reassemble him.

> When Prajāpati had emitted the creatures, his limbs fell apart. (ŚB 1.6.3.35)

> When he had emitted the creatures and traversed the entire course, he fell apart in pieces...When he had fallen into pieces, the breath came out the middle, and, once the breath had left, the gods abandoned him. He said to Agni: "Rebuild me." (ŚB 6.1.2.12; cf., ŚB 7.1.2.1; ŚB 7.4.2.11-13; ŚB 7.5.1.16-20; ŚB 8.2.3.9; ŚB 9.1.1.6.)

> When he had emitted the creatures, Prajāpati fell into pieces. Being nothing more than a heart, he lay there. He let out a cry: "Ah! My life!" The waters heard him; with the *agnihotra*, they came to his aid; they brought him back his trunk. (TB 2.3.6.1; cf., the *sāman* called *prajāpater hṛdayam*, TMB 5.44; TS 7.5.8.1; ŚB 9.1.2.40)

Agni, Vāya, Āditya, Candramas brought back his four limbs, and the *paśu*(s) brought back his hair, skin, bones, and marrow.

> Prajāpati, after having emitted the beings, lay exhausted. The gods gathered the sap and strength of the beings and used it to heal him. (TB 2.3.6.1; cf., GB 2.4.12)

Moreover, Prajāpati, unmistakably, after each act of creation, feels "empty":

> When he had emitted all beings, Prajāpati thought he was emptied; he was afraid of death. (ŚB 10.4.2.2; likewise, TS 1.7.3.2; TB 1.1.10.1; MS 1.6.12; TMB 9.6.7)

The sacrifice is a difficult operation, and for it to succeed, not a single element can be omitted. More than once, the work of creation undertaken by Prajāpati fails due to the lack of a necessary complement.

> When Prajāpati emitted creatures, he emitted them inanimate; he sniffed them with the ritual cry *hin* and the creatures breathed. (GB 2.3.9)

> The creatures he emitted were dying of hunger; he gave them food through the *sāman saubhara*, which has as its prelude *ūrj* ("sustenance") and then they shone. (TMB 8.8.14; the same motif, TMB 6.7.19; cf., Kāṭh 31.10; ŚB 2.5.1.3)

> Prajāpati emitted the creatures; they were without distinction, without consciousness, and devoured one another; Prajāpati was dismayed; he saw the rite (of the *ekona-*

> *pañcaśad-rātrī*(s)), and then he organized the world: cows became cows, horses became horses, humans became humans, and beasts became beasts. (TMB 24.11.2)

The sacrifice is such a formidable act that creatures, unsettled by it, frequently turn away.

> Prajāpati emitted the creatures. Once emitted, they went away from him. "He will eat us," they said to each other frightened. He said to them: "Come back to me; I will eat you in such a way that when you are eaten, you will multiply in offspring." (TMB 21.2.1; cf., TS 2.4.4.1; GB 2.5.9)

> The creatures emitted turned away from Prajāpati; he raised a light for them; seeing the light, the creatures returned to him. (TB 1.1.5.4; MS 1.6.6; AB 13.12.2)

His sovereignty, contested, is imposed only through the manifestation of his power.

> Prajāpati emitted the creatures; they refused to recognize his supremacy; he extracted the sap from space and from the creatures and made a garland from it, which he wore, then the creatures agreed to acknowledge his supremacy. (TD 16.4.1-3)

To sustain himself and achieve his goals, Prajāpati, the sacrifice, must endure many struggles. First, he must discipline Agni, his formidable ally.

> He gave birth to Agni from his mouth... and then Agni turned toward him with his mouth wide open. Prajāpati was so terrified that his own greatness left him...He searched within himself for an offering...the offering pleased Agni...and Agni withdrew. (ŚB 2.2.4.1-6; cf., TB 1.1.3.11; TB 1.1.5.7)

He must also disarm those gods who, out of personal resentment, oppose his work.

> The Maruts killed Prajāpati's creatures, saying: "They do not implore us in their sacrifices." Prajāpati then saw this offering to the Maruts; he offered it...to save the creatures from their blows. (TB 1.6.2.2-3; cf., ŚB 2.5.1.12-13)

Other gods are inherently hostile to the sacrifice; for instance, Varuṇa seized Prajāpati's creatures and afflicted them with cruel diseases. To redeem them, Prajāpati devised a new rite (ŚB 2.5.2.1-3; KB 5.3; TB 1.6.4; TS 1.8.3; MS 1.10.10; GB 2.1.21). But Prajāpati's most relentless adversary is Mṛtyu Pāpman, Death, the Evil One, who does not easily yield to the sacrifice:

> Prajāpati carried all beings within his womb; as they dwelled within him, Death, the Evil One, seized them. He said to the gods: "With you, I want to wrest all these beings from Death, the Evil One"...and he tore all beings away from Death, the Evil One. (ŚB 8.4.2.1-2)

> Prajāpati was born to live a thousand years. Just as one would look across to the other shore of a river, he gazed at the other end of his life. He went on worshiping, laboring, desiring progeny... (ŚB 11.1.6.6)

> He practiced intense austerities for a thousand years in his desire to cast off Death... In the thousandth year, he became entirely purified. (ŚB 10.4.4.1-3; cf., ŚB 8.4.3.1; ŚB 8.4.4.2; ŚB 8.5.1.6)
>
> He freed himself from Death, which is Evil. (ŚB 8.5.2.1; cf., GB 2.3.12)

Prajāpati, the Sacrifice, is the father of both the gods and the asuras; both are known as Prajāpatyas.

> Prajāpati emitted the gods and the asuras. (TS 3.3.7.1; TB 1.4.1.1; TMB 18.1.1)

It is he who distributed the sacrifices and hymns among them (AB 12.2.1; ŚB 13.2.1.1; TS 1.7.3.2), just as he assigned to all beings their means of existence.

> The beings came respectfully to Prajāpati; the beings—these were the creatures: "Determine how we may live," they said to him. The gods, wearing the sacrificial thread and bending their right knee, approached him. He said to them: 'Sacrifice is your food; to you belongs immortality, to you the vital force; the sun shall be your light." Then the pitaras approached, wearing the sacrificial thread over their right shoulder and bending their left knee. He said to them: "Every month, you shall have food; to you belongs the funeral offering, to reach you as the swiftness of thought; the moon will be your light." Then men, clothed and prostrated, approached. He said to them: "Morning and evening, you shall eat; to you progeny belongs, to you death belongs; fire shall be your light." Then the animals approached; he granted them the freedom to eat as they pleased, saying: "At random encounters, whether in due time or out of time, eat..." Then, it is said, the asuras approached. He gave them darkness and deception. (ŚB 2.4.2.1-5)

As the father of the gods, he is also, from another perspective, their son:

> He is both father and son: in that he emitted Agni, he is Agni's father; in that Agni reconstituted him, Agni is his father; in that he emitted the gods, he is the father of the gods; in that the gods reconstituted him, the gods are his fathers. They are both father and son, Prajāpati and Agni, Agni and Prajāpati, Prajāpati and the gods, the gods and Prajāpati. (ŚB 6.1.2.26-27)

Prajāpati, who is the sacrifice itself, is naturally the origin of sacrifice.

> He emitted the sacrifice. (AB 34.1.1; TB 1.7.1.4; KB 6.15; TS 3.3.7.1; MS 1.6.9)

He is also the sacrificer, and the most scrupulous of sacrificers.

> Prajāpati practiced intense austerities...he wiped his forehead, and it became melted butter. He extended it toward the fire but was seized by doubt: "Should I offer it?

> Should I not offer it?" he said to himself. said to himself...Vāc said to him: "Offer it." He said: "Who are you?" She replied, "Speech, which is yours." He made the offering with the word: "*svāhā*!" (The one who is mine has said it) (TB 2.1.2.1-3; MS 1.8.1; ŚB 2.2.4.6; cf. GB 1.2.18; GB 1.2.24)

Since he is the sacrifice, Prajāpati is the first of the victims, just as he is the first of the sacrificers. He must immolate himself to allow the gods to perform the saving rites.

> Prajāpati gives himself to the gods as a sacrifice. (TMB 7.2.1)

> Prajāpati gives himself to the gods. The sacrifice truly belonged to them, for the sacrifice is the food of the gods. When he had given himself to the gods, he emitted an image of himself, which is the sacrifice; through the sacrifice, he redeemed himself from the gods. (ŚB 11.1.8.2-4)

He also was the first to reap the fruit of the sacrifice, for he was the first to ascend to heaven.

> When he had created the creatures, he rose upwards; he went to that world where that one (the sun) shines, for there was as yet no other than him who was worthy of the sacrifice. (ŚB 10.2.2.1)[8]

Master of creatures, master of worlds, Prajāpati gathers in himself both name and form.

> Prajāpati created the creatures; once created, they were in confusion. He penetrated them with form. That is why it is said: "Prajāpati is the form." He penetrated them with the name. That is why it is said: "Prajāpati is the name." (TB 2.2.7.1)

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa teaches the same formula but substitutes Prajāpati with its exact equivalent, the Brahman, both rite and liturgy at once.

> In the beginning was the Brahman. He emitted the gods...And he went over there, far away. Having gone there, he considered: "How could I penetrate those worlds?" Then he penetrated them through these two: name and form. Everything that has a name, he is that name; and even what has no name, what is known by form as a form, he is that form; he is precisely as much as form and name...Of these two, one surpasses the other—it is form; for even what is a name is precisely a form...The mind is form, for through the mind one knows: "This is a form"; speech is name, for through speech one grasps the name. (ŚB 11.2.3.1-6)

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[8] AB 17.1.1 names a daughter of Prajāpati, Sūryā Sāvitrī, who is married to Soma. TB 2.3.10.1 refers to her as Sītā Savitrī and recounts the story of her love with Soma. TS 2.3.5.1 and MS 2.2.7 expand on this legend.

The same thesis is presented in another episode in a dramatic form.

> Spirit and voice were disputing over which held the highest rank. Each claimed superiority over the other. Then spirit said: "I am better than you, for you say nothing unless I have grasped it first; you merely imitate and follow me; certainly, I am better than you." Then the voice said: "I am better than you, for what you know, it is I who express and communicate it." They brought their dispute before Prajāpati. Prajāpati ruled in favor of spirit: "Spirit," he said, "is better than you, for you merely imitate and follow it." (ŚB 1.4.5.8-11; TS 2.5.11.4; MS 4.6.4)

It seems that here we have the seed, in this short passage, one can glimpse the early development of this concept of the dispute between the organs so familiar to the Upaniṣads (e.g., Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad 6.2.7-14), and reduced in the West by Roman genius to the famous fable of the Members and the Stomach.

If Prajāpati assigns the highest rank to the spirit, let us not forget that Prajāpati himself is the spirit, speech, Vāc, nonetheless occupies an exalted position. She is Prajāpati's "own voice"; she intervenes when Prajāpati hesitates, gripped by the principles of the ritual (see above, TB 2.1.2.1-3; MS 1.8.1; ŚB 2.2.4.6); she enlightens him when he is weakened.

> Prajāpati emitted the creatures; he fainted; Vāc raised a light for him. He said: "Who then has raised a light for me?" She said, "It is speech that belongs to you." (TMB 10.2.1)

Her power makes her desirable to both the gods and the asuras; to secure possession of her, the gods do not hesitate to resort to the crudest means of seduction.

> The gods and the asuras, both offspring of Prajāpati, inherited from Prajāpati, their father...The gods received the sacrifice, Yajña; the asuras received speech, Vāc...The gods said to Yajña: "Vāc is a woman; call upon her, and she will surely invite you." But, he considered in that moment: "Vāc is a woman; I will call upon her, and she will invite me." He called upon her. But from afar, she at first showed him only indifference. And that is why a woman called upon by a man at first shows him only indifference. He said: "From afar, she has shown me only indifference." They said to him: "Call upon her, master, and she will invite you." He called out to her. She only responded with a nod of her head. And that is why when a woman is called by a man, she only responds with a nod of her head. He said: "She only spoke to me with a nod of her head." They said: "Call her, master, and she will certainly invite you." He called out to her, and she invited him to come near her. And that is why, in the end, a woman invites a man to come near her. He said: "She invited me to come near her." The gods considered: "Vāc is a woman. Let her not lead him away to her side! Speak to her in these terms: 'I will remain here, come to me.' Then, when she comes, announce it to us." So, as he remained in place, she came

> to him. And that is why, when a man stays in a good position, the woman comes to him. He announced her arrival to them: "She has arrived," he said. Thus, the gods separated her from the asuras. (ŚB 3.2.1.18-23; cf., Ṣaḍv 1.1.8; TS 6.1.3.6; MS 3.6.3, substitutes Dakṣinā for Vāc)

Having been won over to the gods, Vāc secured new conquests for them.

> The Gandharva Viśvāvasu had stolen the Soma that the gods coveted. The gods said: "The Gandharvas have a passion for women; let us send Vāc to them. She will return to us with Soma." They sent Vāc to them, and she returned to them with Soma. The Gandharvas followed her and said: "Soma for you, Vāc for us!" The gods said: "So be it! But if she comes to us, do not take her by force! Let us invite her from both sides." They invited her from both sides. The Gandharvas recited the Vedas to her: "This is what we know, what we know!" And the gods, having created the lute, played music and sang: "This is how we will sing to you! This is how we will entertain you!" She turned toward the gods and came to them. But since she came to them lightly, preferring dance and song to the recitation and declamation of hymns, for this reason, even today, women are nothing but frivolity...That is why, when someone dances and sings, women fall madly in love. (ŚB 3.2.4.3-6; TS 6.1.6.5; MS 3.7.3; AB 5.1.1)

Like all elements of sacrifice, Vāc is as dangerous as she is benevolent. A single misstep risks unleashing terrible calamities. The Aṅgiras once chose Sūrya over Vāc as their priestly reward.

> Vāc became angry with them: "By what right is he worth more than me, to be received while I am refused?" She distanced herself from them and positioned herself between the gods and the asuras, who were in battle. She transformed into a lioness and advanced triumphantly. The gods solicited her, and so did the asuras. Agni was the messenger of the gods, while the *asura-rakṣa* Saharakṣas was the messenger of the asuras. (ŚB 3.5.1.21; parallel episodes: TS 6.2.7.1; MS 3.8.5 substitutes the *uttara-vedi* for Vāc)

She then made a pact with the gods.

At another time, she abandoned the gods and, to escape them, resorted to new transformations.

> Vāc deserted the gods; she entered the waters. The gods demanded her back from them. "What will we gain in return?" the waters asked. "Whatever you wish," the gods replied. The waters said: "Let us have no contact with the impurities that men introduce into us; let us not have contact with them!" Rejected, she went further. She entered the trees. The gods demanded her back from them, but the trees did not return her. The gods cursed them: "May your own wood be the lightning that strikes you

> down!" That is why trees are cut down using their own wood as an axe, for they are cursed by the gods. The trees divided Vāc into four hiding places: the drum, the lute, the axle, and the bow. That is why the most expressive, the most enchanting voice is the voice of the trees, for it was once the voice of the gods. (TMB 6.5.10-13; cf., TS 6.1.4.1; MS 3.6.8; and cf., MS 2.5.9)

The precise analysis of language is the surest safeguard against the dangers of error inherent in formulas. Even before men, the gods had already provided for this:

> Vāc had only one manner of speaking, for it was indistinct. Indra said: "Give me a share of Soma, and I will make speech distinct for you. With the help of speech, he made speech distinct. (MS 4.5.8; TS 6.4.7.3; cf., ŚB 4.1.3.12)

Human speech, which is distinct, is only a quarter of Vāc in total:

> There is a quarter of Vâc that is distinct—it is the speech of men. There is a quarter of Vāc that is indistinct—it is the speech of cattle. There is a quarter of Vāc that is indistinct—it is the speech of birds. There is a quarter of Vāc that is indistinct—it is the speech of insects. (ŚB 4.1.3.16)

> It is in the land of learned priests, in Kuru-Pañcala, that speech resonates best (ŚB 3.2.3.15):

> It is in the northern region that Vāc is best recognized, and it is to the north that one goes to learn the language, and he who comes from there is listened to attentively. (KB 7.6)

The barbarians, on the other hand, speak a demonic language:

> The gods separated Vāc from the asuras...and the asuras, deprived of Vāc, crying "*he 'lavo! he 'lavah!*" were utterly lost. Such was the speech they spoke: enigmatic. This is the *mleccha* (barbarian) language. Thus, a Brahmin should not speak *mleccha*, for it is the speech of the asuras. (ŚB 3.2.1.23-24)

II — SACRIFICE AND THE GODS

Prajāpati brought forth two superior orders of creatures: the Devas and the asuras (ŚB 1.2.4.8; TS 3.3.7.1; TB 1.4.1.1). The right of primogeniture remains undecided between the two groups (MS 4.2.1; TB 2.3.8.1-3; KB 6.15); sometimes it is attributed to one, sometimes to the other. The manner of their birth, however, establishes a difference in dignity: the gods are produced from Prajapati's very mouth, whereas the asuras originate from his lower organs (ŚB 11.1.6.7-8; TB 2.2.9.5). Yet, both have equal claims to their paternal inheritance, which they divide equally (ŚB 1.7.2.22; ŚB 9.5.1.12). Unfortunately, sacrifice is an indivisible good, and both parties covet it with equal fervor (ŚB 1.5.3.2). The asuras are superior in physical strength (TMB 18.1.1; TS 5.3.11.1; AB 4.6.1), but sacrifice is a matter of knowledge, and in the end, the asuras will be defeated.

The number of gods is undetermined. When Yājñavalkya was questioned by Vidagdha Śakalya, he successively counted three thousand three, three hundred and three; thirty-three; two; one and one-half; and, one. However, this dialogue, shared by two Brāhmaṇas, aligns particularly with the spirit of the Upaniṣads—it was even repeated verbatim in one of the most famous ones (ŚB 11.6.3.1-11; JB 2.76-77 [*JAOS* XV, 238-40]; BĀU 3.9.1-10 [*equals* ŚB 14.6.9])[9]. The number of gods remains constant:

> As many gods as there were in the beginning, so there are now. (TMB 6.9.16)

The gods have physical bodies: Indra has three bodies (TS 2.4.2.1); Agni has several (AB 11.4.2); to create Rudra, the gods combined their most terrifying forms (AB 13.9.1); elsewhere, they set aside their bodies as a pledge for the oaths they had sworn (ŚB 3.4.2.5; AB 4.7.4; TS 6.2.2.1; MS 3.7.10; see below regarding *tānūnaptra*). Bound to their bodies, they do not possess omnipresence and cannot respond simultaneously to multiple supplicants.

> Jamadagni and the ṛṣis were offering soma at the same time; then Jamadagni saw the *sāman vihavya*, and Indra turned toward him. (TMB 9.4.14; cf., TS 3.1.7.3)
>
> Kutsa and Luśa each invoked Indra separately; Indra turned toward Kutsa. Kutsa bound him with a hundred straps around his testicles. Luśa then called out to Indra: "Free yourself, leave Kutsa, come here. How could one remain calmly tied by the testicles like

[9] On the question: "Who is the one god?" ŚB 11.6.3.10 answers, *prāṇa*; the Upanishad, *brahma*. The JB is closer to the ŚB than to the Upaniṣad; it removes the "one and one-half."

> that?" Indra cut the bonds and fled. Kutsa then saw this *sāman*, used it to praise Indra, and Indra turned toward him. (TMB 9.2.22)[10]

For the sustenance of their bodies, the gods need sacrifice; it is their nourishment (ŚB 8.1.2.10; ŚB 1.2.5.24; TS 3.2.9.7; MS 1.6.13). However, they are beyond the senses (ŚB 3.1.3.25). Their principle of life is the sacrifice (ŚB 8.6.1.10; ŚB 14.3.2.1), or it is the triple science of which sacrifice is taught (ŚB 10.4.2.21); it is also perfect bliss (ŚB 10.3.5.13). Their superior intelligence delights in what surpasses the senses;[11] the gods are truth while men are error (ŚB 1.1.2.17; ŚB l 3.9.4.1; ŚB 3.3.2.2); the gods are made of truth (AB 1.6.6; KB 2.8); Prajāpati created the gods from truth, the asuras from error (MS 1.9.3).

> This pact, the gods still do not transgress even today. For what would they be if they transgressed it? Then they would speak an inaccurate word! Now, there is only one observance that the gods follow: truth. And that is why their victory is final. (ŚB 3.4.2.8)

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[10] The JB, which recounts the same story, introduces a new concept that reflects the evolution of religious ideas: "Indra, being invoked simultaneously by both priests, stops between them and says, 'Each of you take a part of me; with one of you I will drink with my person, with the other with my greatness.' They each took a share: Kutsa obtained the person, Luśa the greatness. The person and the greatness are the two aspects of Indra." The fragment preserved from the Śātyāyana Brāhmaṇa is too incomplete to tell us whether this text also acknowledged the splitting of Indra (JB 1.1.228 – see, Hans Oertel, "Contributions from the Jaminīya Brāhmaṇa to the History of the Brāhmaṇa Literature," *JAOS* XVIII, 32). [Tr. Note: The Śātyāyana Brāhmaṇa is quoted in later Brāhmaṇa commentaries, e.g., that of Sāyaṇa, but is not extant; see, HIL, 349.]

[11] A familiar thought from the Brāhmaṇas but presented in formulas specific to them: "*parokṣakāmā hi devāḥ*" (ŚB 6.1.1.2.7; ŚB 4.2.12; ŚB 9.1.1 .2; ŚB 10.6.2.2; ŚB 14.1.1.3); "*parokṣapriyā hi devāh*" (AB 13.9.6; AB 14.5.2; AB 35.4.4; TB 1.5.9.2; TB 2.3.11.4); "*parokṣapriyā iva hi deva bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣaḥ*" (GB 1.1.1; GB 1.2.21; GB 1.3.19; GB 1.4.23). The formula is generally used to introduce wordplay as an explanation: *maghavant* equals *makhavant*; *śatarudriya* equals *śāntarudriya*; *dīkṣā* equals *dhīkṣā; aṅgiras* equals *aṅga-rasa*; *mānuṣa* equals *mādusa*. It would be unfair to denounce these kinds of etymological puns as mere childishness or priestly jesting. By applying their ingenuity to the analysis of language, the grammarians of the Brahmanical schools undoubtedly experienced a kind of scientific amazement in observing how a slight nuance in sound could distinguish two entirely different ideas in expression. Convinced by their religious system of the power of the word, they believed they had discovered an unrivaled instrument of action; masters of modifying sounds, they saw themselves as masters of altering reality at will.

However, one should not misunderstand the value of these words. Truth, from the Brahmanical perspective, is not a moral notion: the stories of the gods abound with deceit and disloyalty. Truth must be understood in the narrow sense of ritual: it is the exactitude in the practices and formulas of sacrifice. If truth ensures the gods' ultimate triumph, it is not because of the prestige of virtue, but because of the power of the magical rites that constitute the sacrifice. This truth, moreover, is not inherent to the divine nature; the gods acquired it—just like all their other advantages—through time and great struggle.

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, entered into possession of the inheritance of their father, Prajāpati; this inheritance was Vāc (the Word), both truth and error[12]—truth and error at once. Now, both the gods and the asuras spoke truth, and both spoke error. Since their language was the same, they were the same. The gods rejected error and accepted only truth; the asuras rejected truth and accepted only error. Then Truth, which had been with the asuras, thought: "Surely the gods reject error and accept only truth. I must go to them." And she passed over to the gods. And Error, which had been with the gods considered: "The asuras, indeed, reject truth and accept only error." "Well then," said Error, "I must go to them." And she passed over to the asuras. The gods spoke only truth, the asuras spoke only error. Because the gods spoke nothing but truth, they weakened and grew poor; and that is why one who speaks only and always the truth grows weak and poor. But in the end, they come fully into being, and, in the end, the gods came fully into being. And the asuras, speaking only and always error, flourished like salt and grew rich; and that is why one who speaks only and always error flourishes like salt and grows rich. But in the end, they lose everything, and the asuras lost everything. Truth is the triple science. The gods said, "Let us perform a sacrifice and develop the truth." They offered the *dīkṣaṇīyā*. The asuras noticed: "Behold, the gods are performing a sacrifice and developing the truth. Let's go take what belongs to us from it." (ŚB 9.5.1.12-27)

The gods then tried another offering; the asuras came back again. This incident happened eight times; finally:

> The gods completed the sacrifice; having completed it, they obtained the entire truth. As a result, the asuras were struck down. The gods came into being; the asuras lost everything.[13]

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[12] [Tr. Note: I have followed Lévi's translation of *satya* as "la vérité" and *aṇrta* as "l'erreur," though the latter term is often translated into English as "falsehood."]

[13] [Tr. Note: There is no Brāhmaṇa reference for this quotation in Lévi, p. 40.]

The gods are glory and beauty (ŚB 2.1.4.9; ŚB 3.4.2.8); but they do not owe this privilege to their nature. It is through sacrifice that they became so (TMB 7.5.6; TS 2.3.3.1; ŚB 14.1.1.3). They became luminous by completely rejecting evil (ŚB 2.1.4.9; AB 19.3.3). Nor are they immortal by birth.

> As men are, so were the gods in the beginning. They had a desire: "Let us reject yearning, evil, death, and go to the divine assembly." (TS 7.4.2.1)

> The gods, in the beginning, were mortal; it was when they were filled with *brahman* (sacred knowledge) that they became immortal. (ŚB 11.2.3.6)

The fear of death haunts the gods and directs most of their actions.

> The gods feared death, which is the end, which is the year, which is Prajāpati. "May it not be that with the days and nights, our life is brought to an end!" They performed sacrifices, but they did not obtain immortality. They performed other rites...and still they did not obtain immortality. They went on worshipping, laboring, desiring to attain immortality. (ŚB 10.4.3-8)

Prajāpati then teaches the gods the necessary rites. "Thus did the gods, and they became immortal."[14] The help of Prajāpati—in other words, recourse to sacrifice itself—is the gods' usual resource.

> After killing the asuras, the gods were afraid of death; they ran to Prajāpati. Prajāpati sacrificed on their behalf, and the gods attained immortality. (MS 2.2.2; TS 2.3.2.1; TMB 24.19.2)

The hymns naturally come to replace Prajāpati in this role.

> Having killed the asuras, the gods were afraid of death; they saw the hymns, they entered into them; they used them to cover themselves. (MS 3.4.7; cf., MS 4.6.9)

Yama, on the other hand, can stand in for Mṛtyu (Death), because "Yama is death" (MS 2.5.6).

> The gods and Yama were fighting in this world; Yama took away the gods' virile strength...The gods thought: "Yama has become what we are." They ran to Prajāpati. (TS 2.1.4.3; MS 2.5.3)

Once again, Prajāpati instructed them and gave them victory.

The pursuit of immortality puts the gods in conflict with the asuras.

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[14] [Tr. Note: There is no Brāhmaṇa reference for this quotation in Lévi, p. 41.]

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, were in rivalry; both were without personal life, for they were mortal, and whoever has no personal life is mortal. Among them all, Agni alone was immortal; and it was from him, the immortal, that both sides drew their life. Now, whenever one of them was killed, that one came back to life. As a result, the gods remained, in the end, the weakest. They went on worshipping, laboring: "Ah! If only we could triumph over the asuras, our rivals, who are mortal!" Then they saw that immortality, the ritual establishment of the fire...They established it within themselves, in their innermost being, and once they had established it within themselves, in their innermost being, they became immortal, they became invincible, and they triumphed over their rivals, who were subject to defeat and death. (ŚB 2.2.2.8-14)

The asuras, however, had the advantage; beyond their superior numbers, they also had a prior claim of ownership.

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict; at that time, immortality belonged to the asuras, in Śuṣṇa Dānava. Śuṣṇa carried it in his mouth; when the gods were struck down, they truly died, but when the Asuras were struck, Śuṣṇa would blow on them and they would breathe again. Indra observed: "Immortality is with the asuras, in Śuṣṇa Dānava." He transformed himself into a ball of honey and placed himself in Śuṣṇa's path. Śuṣṇa opened his mouth to swallow it. Indra turned into a falcon and snatched the ambrosia from his mouth. (Kāṭh 37.14 [*Indische Studien* III, 466]; cf., TD 12.5.23)

The conquest of *amṛta* is only one episode in a long story. The gods rose to world-sovereignty only through countless battles and ritual victories, and their example is well suited to inspire confidence in the faithful. In conflict with more powerful adversaries, they had to win, inch by inch, every domain over which they now reign as undisputed masters. The tale of these battles fills the Brāhmaṇas, and here again—here above all—each seems to have deliberately sought to create a unique formula. These formulas fall into two major categories: one is characterized by the use of the word "rivalry" (*spardh*); the other, by the word "conflict" (*saṃyat*); the different tenses used to describe the action introduce further subdivisions within each of these two groups.[15]

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[15] The ŚB the perfect tense of "*spardh*" in the first five books, and the imperfect tense in books 6–10, without any exception; in the following books, both forms appear: *devāś ca vā asurāś ca ubhaye prajāpatyāḥ paspṛdhire* (ŚB 1.2.4.8; ŚB 1.2.5.1; ŚB 2.2.2.8; ŚB 2.4.3.2; ŚB 3.4.4.3; ŚB 3.6.1.8; ŚB 4.2.4.11; ŚB 5.1.1.1, and ŚB 11.1.8.1); *devāś ca...aspardhanta* (ŚB 6.6.2.11; ŚB 6.6.3.2; ŚB 7.4.2.33; ŚB 9.2.3.8, and ŚB 11.5.9.3; ŚB 13.8.1.5). The formula in TMB is: *devāś ca vā asurāś cāspardhanta* (e.g., TMB 8.3.1; TMB 12.3.14; TMB 12.5.23; TMB 21.13.2); but, *devāsurā aspardhanta* (TMB 11.5.8). The MS prefers the formula: *devāś ca*

Some theologians have categorically denied all the so-called battles between the gods and the asuras; according to them, the sacrifice alone, by its own power, destroyed the asuras.

> Prajāpati emitted the asuras...He had barely emitted them when there was something like darkness. He understood: "Surely, I have emitted evil, since, upon their emergence, there was something like darkness." And then he pierced them with evil; and thus they were ruined. That is why it is said: "All the accounts of the dealings between the gods and the asuras—whether in the commentaries or in the stories—none of that truly happened." For, it was Prajāpati who pierced them with evil, and that is how they were destroyed. (ŚB 11.1.6.8-9)

But this doctrine did not prevail, and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which expresses it did not bother to abide by it.

When war breaks out, the odds seem to be in favor of the asuras. They are the strongest, and they possess the same ritual means.

> The gods and the asuras proceeded, doing exactly the same in the sacrifice; whatever the gods did, the asuras also did. And there were neither victors nor vanquished. (MS 1.9.8; MS 2.5.3; GB 2.2.11; TS 1.7.3.3; TS 3.2.2.2; TB 1.5.6.1; AB 9.7.1; cf., AB 15.5.1; AB 16.5.1)

But the gods, more favored and perhaps more pious, soon begin to take the lead. Among all the episodes of this strange ritual epic—where the heroes are priests and the weapons are sacrifices—the most developed and the most characteristic is, without doubt, the conquest of the *upasad*(s). The *upasad*(s) are offerings of clarified butter addressed to Agni, Soma, and

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vā asurāś cāspardhanta (e.g., MS 1.4.14; MS 1.9,8; MS 1.11.9; MS 2.1.11; MS 2.3.2; MS 2.5.3; MS 2.5.9; MS 3.10.5; MS 3.10.6; MS 4.2.3) and, as an exception: *devāś ca vā asurāś ca saṃayatanta* (MS 4.3.4); *devāś ca...saṃyattā āsan* (MS 1.6.10). The TS employs almost exclusively: *devāsurāḥ samyattā āsan* (TS 1.5.1.1; TS 2.2.11.5; TS 2.3.7.1; TS 2.4.2.1; TS 2.4.3.1; TS 5.3.11.1; TS 5.4.1.1; TS 5.4.6.2; TS 6.2.2.1; TS 6.3.10.5) and sporadically: *devāsurā...aspardhanta* (TS 2.1.3.1; TS 2.6.1.3); cf., also: *devāś ca yamaś ca...aspardhanta* (TS 2.1.4.4). The TB uses only: *devāsurāḥ samyattā āsan* (TB 1.1.6.1; TB 1.7.1.2; TB 1.5.9.1; TB 1.8.3.3). The Kāṭh use of the formula: *devāś ca vā asurāś ca samyyattā āsan* in the episode discussed above (Ind Stud 3, 466 *equals* Kāṭh 37.14). The AB, nearly consistently, has: *devāsurā vai...samayatanta* (AB 3.3.5; AB 4.6.1; AB 10.4.1; AB 22.6.1) but, *devāsurā vai...samyetire* (AB 37.6.1). The KB has once: *devāsurā vai...samyattā āsuh* (KB 1.2). The ṢaḍvB has side by side: *devāsurā ha samyattā āsan* (ṢaḍvB 1.1.24) and: *devāś ca vā asurāś ca...aspardhanta* (ṢaḍvB 6.2). From this standpoint, the composite character of the GB reveals itself: *devāś ca ha va asurāś cāspardhanta* (GB 1.2.19; GB 2.1.7); *devāś ca ha vā asurāś ca samgrämam samayatanta* (GB 1.3.5); *devāś ca ha vā* [*ṛṣayaś ca*] *asuraiḥ samyattā āsán* (GB 2.2.7).

Viṣṇu, which are part of certain ceremonies; but their name also means "the siege of a fortress." The double meaning of this word made it apt to serve as a meeting point for the two currents of the divine legend.

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict over the possession of these worlds here. Now the asuras turned those worlds over there into fortresses, as they were the strongest and the most robust. They made this one (the earth) a fortress of iron, the atmosphere one of silver, and the sky one of gold. Thus, they turned those worlds into fortresses. The gods said: "Behold, the asuras have made those worlds into fortresses—let us, in turn, make fortresses of these worlds." "Very well," they said. They made this one the shelter (*sadas*), and the atmosphere the fire altar (*āgnīdhraī*), from the sky the two chariots to Soma (*havirdhāma*). Thus, they in turn made fortresses of those worlds. The gods said: "Let us turn to the *upasad*(s), for through the *upasad* one conquers a great citadel." "Very well," they said. With the first *upasad* they used, they drove them (the asuras) out of this world; with the second, out of the atmosphere; with the third, out of the sky. Thus, they expelled them from these worlds. Driven from these worlds, the asuras withdrew into the seasons. (AB 4.6; KB 8.8; GB 2.2.7; MS 3.8.1; TS 6.2.3.1; ŚB 3.4.4.3-5; TMB 12.3.14)

By means of the three *upasad*(s), the gods drive them out of the seasons, then out of the months, then out of the half-months, then out of day and night. The progression of divine conquests in this account conforms to the usual order; the inverse order when it is presented, is an accidental exception (ŚB 1.9.3.11). The gods first effort is to gain a foothold.

> The gods and the asuras were in rivalry; the asuras had a place, the gods had no place; these worlds were the place of the asuras; at each encounter, the gods were completely defeated, for they had no place. (MS 3.10.5)

Once they became masters of a place, they soon took possession of the earth.

> The earth belonged to the asuras; the gods said: "Give us a portion of this earth." The asuras replied: "Make your choice." Then the Vasus conquered the East, the Rudras the South, the Adityas the West, the Maruts the North, and thus the gods won the earth which had belonged to the asuras. (MS 4.1.10; TB 3.2.9.6-7)

Sometimes, the miraculous intervention of a god determines the outcome.

> The earth first belonged to the asuras; the gods had only as much as one can see when sitting. The gods said: "Let us have more." "How much shall we give you?" "As much as this female jackal covers by circling three times—give us that much." Indra transformed himself into a female jackal and circled the earth three times, and thus they gained the earth. (TS 6.2.4.3-4; MS 3.8.3)

The classic avatar of Viṣṇu transformed into a dwarf to take back the world from the asuras already appears in the Brāhmaṇas, but although the main lines of the story are the same in these accounts, the spirit is quite different. The Viṣṇu of the Purāṇas is a savior who descends from heaven to earth out of justice and compassion; the Viṣṇu of the Brāhmaṇas is simply the sacrifice, blind and brutal.

> The gods brought Viṣṇu transformed into a dwarf: "As much as he covers in three steps," they said, "that much is ours!" So, he covered first this, then this, then that, and the gods gained all of it. (MS 3.8.3; ŚB 1.2.5.1-7)

But once the conquest is made, it must be "consolidated":

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, were in rivalry. Now, the earth was unsteady; like a lotus leaf, the wind shook it—it moved sometimes near the gods, sometimes near the asuras. When it came near the gods, they said: "Come, let us stabilize this earth to make it a firm support; once it is firm and stable, we will establish the fires upon it, and we will prevent our rivals from having a share in it." As one would stretch a hide with pegs, they stabilized it to make it a foundation...and they excluded their rivals from having a portion. (ŚB 2.1.1.8-10)

From the conquered earth, the war is carried into the air.

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, were in rivalry for the atmospheric regions. The gods took the regions of the atmosphere from the asuras. (ŚB 9.2.3.8)

> The battle was first fought in the east: the asuras were victorious there; then in the south, and the asuras were victorious; then in the west, and the asuras were victorious; then in the north, and the asuras were victorious; then in the northeast, and the gods were not defeated: that is the invincible region. (AB 3.3.5)

Naturally, it had to be consolidated:

> As the gods were going to the heavenly world, the regions of the air loosened; they consolidated them through a rite. (MS 3.2.3; TMB 8.8.13)

To continue their ascent, the gods seek orientation. Their ignorance troubles them (TDM 5.7.11) and threatens to halt their victories.

> The five regions were confused; through these five deities, they came to recognize them: through Pathyā Svasti they recognized the northern region...through Agni the eastern region...through Soma the southern region...through Savitar the western region...through Aditi the upper region. (ŚB 3.2.3.14-19; TS 6.1.5.1-2; MS 3.7.1; AB 2.1.3-4;

> KB 7.6; likewise: Soma for the south, Savitar for the west, Pathyā Svasti for the north, Aditi for the upper region.)

The final level is reached; the ascent ends triumphantly, in the open sky (various formulations: MS 3.8.5; TS 6.3.10.2; TMB 2.6.2; AB 3.6.36; AB 7.36; TMB 8.9.15; ŚB 1.7.3.1; ŚB 3.9.3.10; ŚB 8.6.1.10). All resistance has vanished; there are no more adversaries to block the way. But Agni rushes ahead and

> ...closes the gate to the heavenly world, for Agni is truly the sovereign of the heavenly world. The Vasus arrive first; they say to him: "You have gone ahead of us, make room for us." "If you do not praise me," he replies, "I will not let you pass; praise me!" "Alright," they said. They praise him, and, being praised, he lets them pass, and they go to the place that suits them. (AB 14.4)

Then come the Rudras, then the Adityas, then the Viśvedevas, and each time the same incident is repeated, followed by the same pact.

It is not enough to have conquered the three worlds through great struggle. The gods must constantly fight against the asuras jealous from new battles. At times, "the asuras sink into a night that the gaze of the gods cannot penetrate, and the gods fail to overcome the demonic darkness" (TMD 9.1.1; TS 1.5.9.2-3) until they discover the appropriate rite. In vain,

> Indra calls out to them: "Come, who will come with me to pursue and scatter the asuras and the night?" He finds no companion among the gods, for they were afraid of the night, of darkness, of death. (AB 16.5.1)

At times, the two parties quarrel over the sun (TMB 5.5.15); at other times, like greedy heirs, they clamor for both halves of the moon, disregarding a fair division.

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, came into possession of the inheritance of their father Prajāpati, namely the two halves of the moon; the waxing half of the moon was obtained by the gods; the waning half of the moon was obtained by the asuras. The gods had a desire: "How could we win the share of the asuras?" They went on, worshiping, and laboring. They saw the rites of the new moon and the full moon, they celebrated them, and they gained the share that belonged to the asuras. (ŚB 1.7.2.22-24)

The year, which represents duration, also provokes a struggle.

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict; they were fighting over the year. The gods used the sacrifices that are made every four months. Through the Vaiśvadeva, they won four months under the leadership of Indra; they made them (as is done to the defeated) bow and turn their heads; through the *varuṇapraghāsa*, they won four more months

> under the leadership of Varuna...through the *sākamedha*, another four months under the leadership of Soma. The sustenance that was in the year, they won. The gods prevailed, and the asuras fell. (TB 1.5.6.3-4)

Another time, the cattle are at stake in this struggle (TMB 13.6.7; MS 3.2.6). The creatures caught up in this colossal quarrel followed their preferences and sided either with the gods or the asuras.

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, were in rivalry. All the trees took the side of the asuras; only the *udumbara* tree did not abandon the gods. Victorious over the asuras, the gods took the trees from them (ŚB 6.6.3.2)

As they were in rivalry, all the plants deserted the gods; only barley remained faithful. The gods triumphed, and with barley, they took back from their rivals the other plants. (ŚB 3.6.1.8-9)

> The seasons, displeased with the gods, passed over to the asuras, the gods' malevolent and hostile cousins. And they made them flourish, as it is told: "While the first among them plow and sow, behind them, others reap and thresh the grain; and even without plowing, the plants would ripen." (ŚB 1.6.1.1-8)

The gods, worried, then sent Agni to make peace with the seasons. The most sacred meter of all, the Gāyatrī, hesitated for a while between the two camps:

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict; the Gāyatrī took from them their vigor, strength, energy, offspring, and herds, and with these she stood apart. They thought: "Whoever she turns to will have everything." And both sides invited her. The gods said: "Viśvakarman!" The asuras said: "*Dābhi*!" And she did not choose between them. But the gods spoke the right formula, and they won over from the asuras their strength, their vigor, their energy, their progeny, their herds. (TS 2.4.3.1; MS 2.1.11; ŚB 1.4.1.34)

The stories of the gods' victories serve to provide a catalog of the ways to arrive at the point of view of the Brāhmaṇas. Often, it is the intervention of Prajāpati, whether spontaneous or solicited, that saves the gods from trouble. The asuras and the gods both compete for his favor:

> The gods and the asuras, both descended from Prajāpati, were in rivalry over the sacrifice, which is Prajāpati, their father. "It will be ours," said one side. "It will be ours," said the other. (ŚB 11.5.9.3; ŚB 1.5.3.2; cf., ŚB 1.9.2.34; ŚB 4.2.4.11)

Prajapati's preference for the gods is never explained in the texts; like the sacrifice he embodies, he is indifferent to morality; his actions stem solely from desire.

> The gods and the asuras were in this world. Prajapati had a desire: "I want to drive out the asuras!" (MS 1.10.5)

He is so unmoved by the actual merits of the two rivals that he cannot even distinguish them in their true form:

> Both were issued from Prajāpati, the gods and the asuras. He could not distinguish them clearly to recognize them: "Here are the ones, here are the others." So, he made the gods into stalks of soma. (TB 1.4.1.1)

In general, it is at the request of the gods that he intervenes: "These gods ran to Prajāpati" (TS 3.3.7.1; MS 2.4.8; SāmavidhB 1.1.15; TS 2.3.2.1; cf., TMB 8.3.1), and through him, the sacrifice that had fled returns, the rain that had refused to fall brings nourishment, the paths that lead to heaven open, and death is turned away.

The gods also rely on those arduous practices referred to in religious language as "effort" (*śrama*), which are usually associated with either asceticism (*tapas*) or worship (√*arc*).

> It is through effort (*śrama*) that the gods truly conquered what they had to conquer. (ŚB 1.6.2.3; AB 7.3.6; ŚB 1.7.2.24; cf., ŚB 1.2.5.18)

Thus, the gods become the prototype of the "*śramaṇa*(s)," the spiritually driven seekers who arose across all the great religious traditions of India, among the orthodox Brahmins as well as the Buddhists and Jainas.

Sacrifice is, par excellence, the means of victory.

> It is through the sacrifice that the gods succeeded in all their endeavors. (ŚB 2.4.3.3)

> Everything the gods do, they do through chanted recitation; chanted recitation is the sacrifice; it is through sacrifice that they do it. (ŚB 8.4.3.2)

> It is through sacrifice that the gods went to the celestial world. (ŚB 1.7.3.1; TS 1.7.1.3; AB 3.5.36)

> It is by sacrificing with all the hymns that the gods conquered the celestial world. (AB 2.3.6; ŚB 3.9.3.10; MS 3.2.3; cf., TMB 7.4.2)

But one must know how to use this precious weapon.

> It is through the perfection of the sacrifice that the gods reached the celestial world; it is through the flaws in the sacrifice that the asuras were defeated. (TS 1.6.10.2)

The fundamental flaw of the asuras, in matters of ritual, is individual pride; each one holds an overly high opinion of his own power, and "pride opens the door to ruin" (ŚB 5.1.1.1; ŚB 11.1.8.1). The gods, more modest and wiser, honor one another.

> The gods and the asuras...were in rivalry. Then the asuras, out of pride, said: "To whom, then, could we offer our oblations?" And they went and made their offerings into their own mouths. But the gods made their offerings into the mouths of one another. And Prajāpati gave himself to them. (ŚB 5.1.1.1-2; ŚB 11.1.8.1-2; cf., GB 2.1.7)

The methods of the asuras serve as examples to be avoided, just as the methods of the gods provide examples to follow. The asuras, when constructing the altar, place the brick with the marked side facing downward (MS 3.2.7); in the preliminaries of the sacrifice, they first shave their hair, then their beard, the armpits (TB 1.5.6.1); at the sacrifice, they offer a white victim, with iron-tipped horns, born of a white mother (MS 2.5.9)— and all these errors bring about their downfall. Both parties, however, pursue success with equal ferocity.

> Aditi was with the gods, Kustā with the asuras. The gods thought: "If we win, we will strike at Kustā's head." The asuras thought: "If we win, we will strike at Aditi's head." The gods won, and they struck off her (Kustā's) head. (MS 4.2.3)

On both sides, the priests are equally capable; but the unscrupulous gods manage to win over the priests of their adversaries.

> Bṛhaspati was the priest of the gods; Śaṇḍa and Marka, of the asuras. The gods had the sacred knowledge; the asuras had the sacred knowledge. Neither side could prevail. The gods won over Śaṇḍa and Marka to their cause. (TS 6.4.10; cf., AB 12.6.2; TMB 6.7.1; GB 2.2.15)

They made a pact and,

> The gods prevailed and the asuras lost everything...Uśanas Kāvya was the priest of the asuras; the gods won him over to their side. (TMB 7.5.20)

Unable to triumph through sacrifice, the asuras turn to magic.

> When the gods had gone through the preliminary ceremonies, the asuras took on their form and, under this disguise, tried to strike them. The gods began accusing each other and gathered together, saying: "Was it you who tried to do this to me? Was it you who tried to strike me?" (ŚB 3.4.3.6)

But the asuras did not dare attack Agni, their destroyer, and Agni led the gods astray. On another occasion:

> They coated the plants, which men and animals feed on, with a magical poison: "If we succeed in this," they said to themselves, "we will overcome the gods!" Men stopped eating and animals stopped grazing. Starvation had nearly wiped out all living creatures. (ŚB 2.4.3.2-3)

> Once again, sacrifice saved the gods. The famine unleashed by the asuras against the gods turned back upon themselves. (TB 1.6.7.2)

The gods, for their part, do not hesitate to lie if it ensures victory.

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict; the gods set truth aside and triumphed over the asuras by means of a lie. (TB 1.8.3.3)

Allied with men and the pitaras against a coalition of asuras, rakṣas, and piśācas:

> The gods won over the rakṣas to their side. The rakṣas said: "Let us choose a reward. If we defeat the asuras, give us half!" Then the gods defeated the asuras. Having conquered them, they drove the rakṣas away. The rakṣas said to them: "You lied!" and they enveloped them. (TS 2.4.1.1)

Indifferent to the lie committed, a well-performed rite once again ensures the gods' victory.

The peaceful authors of the Brāhmaṇas do not often portray the gods and their adversaries as warriors in the human sense. It is interesting to note, even from an isolated testimony, that "the gods fight on chariots, while the asuras stay behind their walls" (ŚB 6.8.1.1). Staffs and bows, when they appear in this epic, quickly give way to other, more reliable weapons.

> The gods and the asuras...were in rivalry. With staffs and bows, the outcome remained undecided. Since the victory was undecided, they said: "Come! Let us decide victory through speech, through sacred knowledge! If one says a word and the other cannot respond with a pairing word, he will lose, and the others will win everything." "Very well," said the gods. The gods said to Indra: "Speak!" Indra said: "One for me!" The others said: "One for us!" Thus, they found a match, for one and one make a pair. "Two (*dvau*) for me!" said Indra. "Two (*dve*) for us!" said the others. Again, they matched; *dvau* and *dve* make a pair. "Three (*trayaḥ*,) for me!" said Indra. "Three (*tisraḥ*) for us!" said the others; *trayaḥ* and *tisraḥ* make a pair. "Four (*catvāraḥ*) for me," said Indra. "Four (*catasraḥ*) for us," said the others; *catvāraḥ* and *catasraḥ* make a pair. "Five (*pañca*) for me!" said Indra. And the others could not find a matching word; for there is no pair beyond that. *Pañca* and *pañca* are the same word repeated, and no longer a complementary pair. Thus, the asuras lost everything, and the gods gained everything from the asuras. (ŚB 1.5.4.6-11; TMB 21.13.2)

Despite their repeated defeats, the asuras do not readily accept being beaten.

> Each time the gods had won the victory, the asuras would resume hostilities against them. (ŚB 1.2.4.8)

Even war itself is not without its reversals.

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict; the asuras defeated the gods, and the vanquished gods were enslaved by the asuras; their vigor, their strength, abandoned them. (TS 2.3.7.1; MS 2.3.7; cf., MS 3.10.6)

Such vigorous and stubborn adversaries inspire in the gods, even after victory, a fear that haunts them.

> The gods were afraid of being attacked by the asuras and the rakṣas: "What if the destructive rakṣas were to attack us from below!" (ŚB 1.2.1.6; cf., ŚB 1.1.2.3; ŚB 3.9.4.6; ŚB 7.3.2.7; ŚB 10.2.5.1; ŚB 7.4.1.33)

While the gods ascend to the sky, the asuras and the rakṣas follow in pursuit to stop them (AB 21.1.5); the worried gods place Agni at the front, at the rear, and on the flanks; protected by this invincible guardian, they reach the heavens (ŚB 1.6.1.11-12). Always uncertain of success, the prudent gods take multiple precautions before battle.

> About to engage in combat, the gods said: "Come, let us remove from this earth the place sacred to sacrifice, which death cannot touch, and place it on the moon. If the victorious asuras drive us from here, then by worship and toil we might still succeed in taking our revenge." Thence they removed from the earth the place sacred to sacrifice, untouched by death, and placed it on the moon; and that is the dark spot one sees on the moon. (ŚB 1.2.5.18; cf., AB 19.5.7; TB 1.1.3.3)

> The gods and the asuras were in conflict. When the gods went to battle, they left their radiant bodies in the care of Agni and Soma. "If they defeat us," they said to themselves, "at least this will remain to us." (TB 1.3.1.1)

Another time, it is their possessions they entrust to keep in reserve in case of defeat (TS 1.5.1.1; TB 1.1.6.1). Once entered into the sky, they still fear being attacked there and erect barriers.

> The gods placed the regions of space at the boundaries to prevent the asuras from following them (MS 3.8.5); they placed the sun, which is over there, as a wall to prevent the asuras from reappearing. (MS 3.8.4)

The precaution was not unwarranted. The asuras, in turn, tried to climb to the sky, like the Giants who piled Pélion upon Ossa. The comparison of the two legends clearly reveals the divergence of the divine epics in India and Greece.

> The asuras built the altar known as *rauhiṇī*. "By this means," they said to themselves, "we will ascend to that world above." Indra observed: "If they manage to complete their altar, they will surpass us." He came, disguising himself as a Brahmin, and added a brick to the construction. He said to them: "Come, let me place this one." "Yes," they said. He placed it. The altar was almost complete; then he said, "I wish to take back what is mine." He went, took his brick, and removed it; when it was taken out, the altar collapsed, and with the fallen altar, the asuras collapsed as well. From those bricks, he made thunderbolts and cut off their heads. (ŚB 2.1.2.13-17; MS 1.6.9; Kāṭh 8.1 [Ind St 3, 465]; TB 1.1.2.4-6)

According to another account, "the asuras were turned into spiders, but two of them flew upward and became the celestial dogs of the sky."[16]

The history of a few divine clans gives more depth to the collective portrait of the gods studied collectively. I will limit myself to reviewing the oldest of these clans, in which the first manifestation of divine conditions occurred.

The sādhyas are the most ancient of all; the passage of time has so blurred their individual features that they survive only with a generic existence.

> The sādhyas were gods before the gods. (TMB 25.8.2; cf., Kāṭh 23.8; Kāṭh 26.7)

They too "desired to ascend to heaven" (TS 7.2.1; TMB 8.3.5; cf., TMB 8.4.9; TMB 25.8.2) and it was through sacrifice that they succeeded. Having existed before the rest of creation, "they could offer to the fire only fire, for there was as yet nothing else to offer" (TS 6.3.5.1; MS 3.9.5; AB 3.5.38). Though they are gods, they sinned through pride, like the asuras, "they deemed themselves above sacrifice" (TS 6.3.4.8; MS 3.9.4).

> The world they inhabit lies beyond the world of the gods. (ŚB 3.7.1.25; cf., Kāṭh 26.4)

They are described as the "divine guardians of the celestial shores" (ŚB 13.4.2.6) along with enigmatic gods: the Āpyas, the Anvādhyas, and the Maruts. A later Brāhmaṇa presents them as turning to Indra for help:

> The sādhya gods were holding a sacrificial session; gravel came into their eyes. They respectfully approached Indra: "How is it that gravel comes into the eyes of those known to you? (He offered them a ritual preparation.) They saw it and they regained their sight. (ṢaḍvB 1.7.2)

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[16] [Tr. Note: There is no Brāhmaṇa reference for this quotation in Lévi, p. 61.]

But in another, much older Brāhmaṇa, it is Indra's own mother, Aditi, who offers her homage to the sādhyas, and it is to their protection that she owes the birth of her sons, the Ādityas (TS 6.5.6.1).

The Sadhyas eventually fall entirely into oblivion, and the Ādityas are then represented as the most ancient of the gods, along with the Aṅgiras:

> In the beginning, there were two classes of beings: the Ādityas and the Aṅgiras. (ŚB 3.5.1.13)

Unlike the sādhyas, the Ādityas and the Aṅgiras have a history; even the circumstances of their birth are known. The legend of the origin of the Ādityas is common to all the Brāhmaṇas of the Yajurveda:

> Aditi desired offspring; she cooked porridge and ate the remains; Dhātar and Aryaman were born to her. She cooked it a second time, ate the remains; Mitra and Varuṇa were born to her. She cooked again, ate the remains; Amśa and Bhaga were born to her. She cooked once more and thought: "By eating the leftovers, sons are born to me two by two; surely the result will be even better if I eat the first portion." She ate the first portion, then made the offering. The two children who were in her womb said: "We shall be like the Ādityas." The Ādityas sought someone to extract and slay them. Amśa and Bhaga extracted and struck them down. But Indra immediately rose to the heights, breathing fully; for the other, it was a dead egg that fell. This is Mārtāṇḍa, from whom are these human creatures. And Aditi ran to the Ādityas and said: "Let him live for me, let him not have come from me in vain." They said: "Then let him speak to us, and let him not be prideful toward us." This is Vivasvant, son of Aditi, from whom come Manu Vaivasvata and Yama. (MS 1.6.12; TS 6.5.6.1-2; TB 1.1.9.1-3; ŚB 3.1.3.3-4; GB 1.2.15)

The origin of the Aṅgiras is more obscure; in the absence of precise traditions, etymology—always accommodating—is invoked. Inflamed by an incestuous passion for his daughter, Prajāpati lets his seed escape, which forms a pond; the gods heat the liquid surface; the first heating gives birth to the sun, the second to Bhṛgu; "at the third heating the Ādityas were born, and the embers (*aṅgāra*) became the Aṅgiras" (AB 13.10.1). Or again, Aṅgiras, their eponym, is said to be produced from the discharge (*aṅga-rasa*) of Varuṇa, heated by pious mortifications (GB 1.1.7).

As soon as they were born and brought face to face, each of the two clans had only one concern: to eliminate their rivals and secure possession of the heavens through sacrifice. Sentimental scruples are out of place here; success goes to the cleverest.

> The Ādityas and the Aṅgiras were in rivalry over who would possess the celestial world. "We will go first." "No, we will." Now the Aṅgiras were the first to see the soma pressing of the following day for the celestial world. They sent Agni (Agni is an Aṅgiras): "Go, announce to the Ādityas that tomorrow we are pressing the soma for the celestial world." When the Ādityas saw Agni, they perceived the pressing of that very day for the celestial world. He went to them and said: "We inform you that tomorrow we will be pressing the soma for the celestial world." They said to him: "And we inform you that we are pressing the soma today itself for the celestial world. You will serve as our priest to reach the celestial world." "Very well," he said, and after this exchange, he returned to the Aṅgiras. They said: "Did you inform them?" "I informed them," he said, "and in turn they invited me." "And did you commit to them?" "I did," he said...Thus, the Aṅgiras were obliged to sacrifice on behalf of the Ādityas. (AB 30.8-9; ŚB 3.5.1.13-17; TMB 16.13.1; GB 2.6.14)

Agni, as a good priest, had obeyed the rule that prescribes always accepting a request for services if it comes from a qualified person. Thanks to a stroke of fortunate inspiration—or chance—the Ādityas arrived first in heaven; the Aṅgiras only followed with difficulty (ŚB 12.2.2.10-11; GB 1.4.23; MS 3.4.2). It took them sixty years to catch up with the rivals who had gotten ahead of them (AB 18.3.5). Thus,

> The Ādityas rose up from here and went to the celestial world; they prospered in this world and prospered in that world as well. (MS 4.3.1; TMB 24.2.2; TS 1.5.4)

However, fortune did not make them benevolent; they applied themselves with jealous care to closing the gates of the blissful world they had conquered.

> They are the ones who guard the paths that lead to the gods; they turn away and push back those who try to pass through. (MS 1.6.12; TB 1.1.9.8)

The Ādityas, for their sacrifice, neither asked for advice nor received any. The Aṅgiras, being less skillful, are often hindered by their ignorance.

> The Aṅgiras were holding a ritual session; they longed impatiently for the celestial world, but they did not know the path that leads to the gods. One of them, Kalyāṇa the Āṅgirasa, went off, pondering, toward the heights. He came upon the Gandharva Ūrṇāyu, who was swaying among the Apsaras, and, whenever he pointed to one, thinking "I would like to have her," she would fall in love with him. Ūrṇāyu said to him: "Hey, Kalyāṇa! You long impatiently for the celestial world, but you do not know the path that leads to the gods. Here is a melody that leads to heaven. If you sing it, you will reach the celestial world, but do not say that you discovered it yourself." Kalyāṇa went away and said, "We long impatiently for the celestial world, but we do not know the path that leads to the gods. Here is a melody that leads to heaven; if we sing it, we will

> arrive in the celestial world." "Who told you this?" "I discovered it myself," he replied. They sang it and reached the celestial world, but Kalyāṇa was left behind, because he had told a lie. (TMB 12.11.10-11)

When Manu divided his wealth among his sons, leaving no share for Nābhanediṣṭha, he directed him to seek compensation from the Aṅgiras.

> The Aṅgiras are holding a ritual session to go to heaven; each time they reach the sixth day, they make a mistake. Teach them to recite these two hymns on the sixth day, and when they ascend to heaven, they will they will give you the thousand (cows) that are used for their sacrifice. (AB 22.9.3-4; TS 3.1.9.4-6)

Nābhanediṣṭha followed his father's advice: "He recited those two hymns to them on the sixth day, and then they came to know the sacrifice, they came to know the celestial world."[17]

The ignorance of the Aṅgiras also exposes them to attacks from malevolent beings, who do not approach the Ādityas.

> While the Aṅgiras were going to heaven, the rakṣas pursued them. (TMB 8.9.5)

> On another occasion, the pitaras poisoned the plants that the Aṅgiras were cultivating for the sacrificial cow, and the Aṅgiras were forced to make a pact with them. (TB 2.1.1.1).

The organization of the divine clans into a disciplined and hierarchical society developed slowly, driven by necessity.

> In the beginning, all the deities were equal...Agni did not have brilliance, Indra did not have strength, Sūrya did not have splendor. (ŚB 4.5.4.1-4; TS 6.6.8.2)

Originally equal, each claimed their rights with fierce determination.

> The offering is made to a specific deity; if one fails to specify, it becomes a common offering to all the gods, and this provokes a quarrel among them. (ŚB 1.1.4.24)

The rites, above all, because of the benefits they ensure, unleash a competition with fierce appetites.

> Mitra and Varuṇa saw the *vāmadevya* melody; they said: "It is we who discovered it; it belongs to us; do not claim it from us." Then Prajāpati said: "It was born from me, it is mine." Then Agni said: "It was born after me, so it belongs to me." Indra said: "It belongs

[17] [Tr Note: There is no Brāhmaṇa reference for this passage in Lévi, p. 68.]

> to the best, and I am the best among you; therefore, it is mine." The Viśvedevas said: "We preside over everything born of the waters; it is ours." Then Prajāpati said: "Let us all have it together, and we shall all live from it." (TMB 7.8.2)

Distrust and bad faith govern the relationships between the gods; brute force is balanced by deceit. Foreign to moral ideas, the ritual act is a battleground where all the worst passions collide.

> The gods held a ritual session: Agni, Indra, Soma, Makha, Viṣṇu—all the gods except the Aśvins. They chose Kurukṣetra as the site of the sacrifice. They held their session saying: "Let us attain fortune; let us attain grandeur; let us have abundant food!" They said: "The first to reach the end of the sacrifice by effort, mortification, faith, sacrifice, and oblations, he shall be our leader. But the benefit shall be shared among all." "Agreed!" they said. Viṣṇu arrived first; he passed ahead of the other gods...But Viṣṇu could not restrain his glory...he took a bow and three arrows and went off to the side; he then rested his head on the end of the bow. The gods did not dare attack him; they stationed themselves all around. Then the ants (specifically the ants called *upadīkā*) said: "What will you give to the one who eats his bowstring?" "We will give him abundant food; even in the middle of the desert, he will find water; he will have all nourishment." "Very well," they said. They approached stealthily and devoured the bowstring; once it was cut, the ends of the bow sprang apart and cut off Viṣṇu's head. It fell to the ground with sound *ghṛṅ*. (ŚB 14.1.1.1-10; MS 4.5.9; TMB 7.5.6)

Treachery on one side, cowardice on the other; morality has no place in the world of the gods. And divine history is full of such incidents. A god never makes a commitment without breaking the agreement as soon as it benefits him.

> The gods held a ritual session in Kurukṣetra. Agni, Soma, and Indra said to one another: "Whoever among us attains glory, we shall all share it equally!" Now, among them, Soma was the first to attain it; they all rushed toward him...But Soma wanted to keep it for himself; he went away into the mountains. (MS 2.1.4; TS 2.3.3.1)

> Agni, as soon as he received the gods' precious treasure for safekeeping, tried to take it for himself and fled. (TS 1.5.1.1; cf., MS 1.6.10; TB 11.6.1; TB 1.3.1.1)

Indra does not hesitate to strike Namuci, as soon as he found a way to get around his oath. In such company, fear of one's neighbor is the principle of wisdom.

> The proverb says: "Everyone in his own home—that's the gods' system". (AB 22.4.2; GB 2.6.10)

The law does not exist; who would take heed of its vain prescriptions? The test of a race settles all disputes and bypasses the slow formalities of justice, and the cleverest ones know well how to benefit from such a seemingly brutal method.

> The gods could not agree on who would drink the soma first: "I want to drink first!" "I want to drink first!" They all desired it. Finally, they came to an agreement: "Let's race! The winner will be the first to drink the soma." "Good," they said. They raced; as they ran at full speed, Vāyu took the lead; Indra came next, then Mitra and Varuṇa, followed by the Aśvins. Indra watched Vāyu: "He's going to win," he thought. He rushed after him: "Let's split it if we win." "No" replied Vāyu, "I want to win alone." "One third for me, and we'll win together." "No," he said again, "I want to win alone." "One quarter for me, and we'll win together." "So be it," said Vāyu. He yielded a quarter to him...Indra and Vāyu won together, then Mitra and Varuṇa together, and finally the two Aśvins. (AB 9.1.1-3)

The prize may change, but the scene remains the same:

> The gods were not in agreement: "It's mine! It's mine!" they said. They agreed: "Well then! Let's race for it! Whoever wins will have it." They took fire as the starting point and the sun as the goal. Now, as they ran at full speed, Agni took the lead. The Aśvins were right behind him; they said to him: "Step aside, we two will win." "Alright," he said, "but we will share the reward together." So be it.

Uṣas, then Indra, both withdrew from the race under the same conditions (the passage continues):

> The Aśvins won...Agni had raced in a chariot drawn by mules; he burned their bellies as he drove them forward, that is why mules do not bear offspring. Uṣas had raced with red cows, that is why there is a red glow at the break of dawn: it is the form of Uṣas. Indra had raced with horses pulling his chariot, that is why the horse has a loud and piercing neigh: it is the form of *kṣatra*, for the horse belongs to Indra. The Aśvins won with donkeys pulling their chariot...that is why the donkey's speed is spent; it is drained; even now, it is the slowest among the beasts of burden. (AB 17.1.4-3; TMB 9.1.35-36)

To whom will the sacrifice go? (ŚB 5.1.1.2-4; ŚB 2.4.3.4-5; TMB 7.2.1-2). To whom, the *vājapeya* and the sovereignty it grants? (MS 1.11.5; TB 1.3.2.1-2). To whom will the plants go (MS 4.3.2; TB 1.6.10)? Once again, the idea of a race is eagerly welcomed to settle rival claims.

The divine society transforms just like human society. The necessity to fight against common enemies dampens jealousies and leads to the acceptance of a shared discipline. The social contract begins to take shape.

> The gods were afraid: "In the midst of our quarrels, the asuras will appear." They divided into several groups to go on campaign and held council. Agni marched with the Vasus, Indra with the Rudras, Varuṇa with the Ādityas, and Bṛhaspati with the Viśvedevas. Arrayed for battle, they held counsel: "Come, our bodies are what we hold most dear; let us pledge them as a deposit in the house of King Varuṇa. If any of us breaks the pact, if any of us tries to disturb the order, let him lose his rights over his pledge!" "Yes, let it be so!" they said. They pledged their bodies in the house of King Varuṇa. (AB 4.7.4-5; ŚB3.4.2.4-5; TS 6.2.2.1-2; GB 2.2.2; MS 3.7.10)

The organization of the divine society begins as a federation of clans, each commanded by a chief; but soon enough, rivalries between the groups emerge, and civil war breaks out among the gods.

> They quarreled; they split into four factions, each refusing obedience to the others: Agni with the Vasus, Soma with the Rudras, Varuṇa with the Ādityas, Indra with the Maruts. (ŚB 3.4.2.1; [against TS 6.2.2.1]; MS 3.7.10; TS 6.2.2.1; TS 2.2.11.5[18]; GB 2.2.2; same division as TS 6.2.2.1)

The asuras, always on the lookout for the right moment, believe their revenge is now assured. Then the gods realize that "without a king, war is not possible" (TB 1.5.9.1; AB 3.3.6), and they entrust authority to a single leader.

> As they were in discord, the asuras and the rakṣas began to pursue them. The gods understood: "We are weakening; the asuras and the rakṣas are upon us; we are serving our enemies' interests. Come, let us agree and obey the authority of one alone." They recognized Indra as their chief. (ŚB 3.4.2.1-2; TS 2.4.2.1)

But once the danger has passed, royal dignity loses its necessity, and the leader returns to the ranks. The title and authority of king shifts from one god to another according to the circumstances.

> The gods said: "Who shall be our king, who shall lead us into battle?" Agni said: "I will be your king. I will march at your head." With Agni as king, with Agni at the forefront, the gods were victorious. (ŚB 2.6.4.2-4)

The war resumed, and once again the gods sought a leader: Varuṇa offered himself and led them to victory; then it was Indra's turn. Another time, "they made Soma their king, and with Soma as king, they conquered the regions of space" (AB 3.3.6). Taught by experience, the gods

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[18] The passage is reproduced, but, *caturdhā vyakraman* is substituted for *pañcadhā vyakrāman* and the mention of *bṛhaspatir viśvair devaih* is deleted accordingly.

made one final advancement: by unanimous consent, they chose a permanent sovereign. Indra, proclaimed king of the gods, was anointed in a solemn ceremony, with all the pomp befitting his majesty.

> The gods, together with Prajāpati, said: "He is the strongest of the gods, the most powerful, the most enduring, the best, the most energetic; let us consecrate him king." They fashioned a throne for him from ritual melodies, and he took his place upon it, reciting the sacred formulas. The Viśvedevas acted as heralds and proclaimed all his royal titles: *samrāj*, *bhoja*, *svarāj*, *virāj*, *rājan*, *parameṣṭhin*. Prajāpati poured the consecration water over him; the Vasus stood at the east, the Rudras at the south, the Ādityas at the west, the Viśvedevas at the north, the sādhyas and Āptyas at the center, and the Maruts and Aṅgiras above, at the zenith. (AB 38.1-3)

From crisis to crisis, from one advance to the next, the divine world had finally taken form. Indra sat on the throne of heaven, just as kings sit on the thrones of earth; but above him still hovers, invisible in its mysterious essence, the sacrifice; and beside kings, untouchable in their proud independence, the Brahmins continue to dominate human hierarchies.

III — THE MECHANISM OF THE SACRIFICE

The sacrifice is a sophisticated and intricate combination of ritual acts and sacred words, or rather, it is the intangible and irresistible power that arises from their conjunction, similar to electric current generated from connected elements. It can be embodied at will in Prajāpati or Viṣṇu, or in the devotee who performs the sacrifice (ŚB 14.2.2.4), or even simultaneously in the sacrificer and the priests he employs (ŚB 9.5.2.16; cf., AB 9.8.5). In reality, it is present everywhere; it resides in a latent state in all that exists (ŚB 14.3.2.1), because "everything that exists participates in the sacrifice" (ŚB 14.3.2.1) yet "like the gods, it eludes the senses" (ŚB 3.1.3.25). The sacrifice is also identical to man, because all the acts involved in the ritual are strictly personal, and the details of the rite deliberately recall the bond of identity that unites the individual, the male, to the sacrifice.

> The sacrifice is man. The sacrifice is man because it is man who offers it; and every time it is offered, the sacrifice is the size of a man. Thus, the sacrifice is man. (ŚB 1.3.2.1; ŚB 3.5.3.1; and cf., ŚB 10.2.1.2; TS 5.2.5.1)

And the imaginative flair of the Brahmanical exegete continues its demonstration by establishing a series of correspondences between the organs of the human body and the elements of the sacrifice: sometimes the head is the soma chariot; the mouth, the *āhavanīya* fire; the top of the skull, the sacrificial post; the belly, the hall; the feet, the two fires (ŚB 3.5.3.2-6); sometimes, the various libation ladles correspond to the limbs, the torso, and the breath (ŚB 1.3.2.2-3).

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa recognizes the classical division of sacrifices into five main categories.

> There are five great sacrifices; these are the great ritual sessions: the sacrifice to beings, the sacrifice to men, the sacrifice to the fathers, the sacrifice to the gods, the sacrifice to the Brahman. Every day, one offers food to living beings: this is the sacrifice to beings. Every day, one gives alms, including the water jar: this is the sacrifice to men. Every day, one makes funeral offerings, including the water jar: this is the sacrifice to the fathers. Every day, one makes offerings to the gods, including firewood: this is the sacrifice to the gods. And the sacrifice to the brahman? The sacrifice to the brahman is sacred study. (ŚB 11.5.6.1-3)

But the enthusiastic exaltation of the sacrifice to the Brahman, which concludes this enumeration, reveals a new orientation of thought, one that is foreign or even opposed to the Brāhmaṇas. The doctrine, in harmony with the text's composition, moves toward the Upaniṣad

that concludes the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. The spirit of the Upaniṣads is expressed even more clearly in another classification of the sacrifices:

> They ask: "Who is the greater? He who sacrifices to the self (*ātman*)? Or, he who sacrifices to the gods?" One must answer: "It is he who sacrifices to the self." He who sacrifices to the Self is the one who knows thus: "By this, such a part of me is purified; by this, such a part of me is set in place." Like a snake sheds its dead skin, so he sheds this mortal body, which is evil; composed of *ṛc*, composed of *yajus*, composed of *sāman*, composed of oblations, he takes possession of the heavenly world. And he who sacrifices to the gods is the one who knows thus: To the gods I sacrifice this; to the gods I offer that. Like a father paying tribute to a superior, or like a *vaiśya* paying tribute to a king, such is he, and he does not attain a place as great as the other. (ŚB 11.2.6.13-14)

The so-called etymologies in which the Brāhmaṇas delight—without being fooled by them—have an advantage over correct etymologies: they clearly express the idea associated with the word in question: The explanation of the word *yajña* ("sacrifice") is, in this respect, particularly insightful:

> Why is it called *yajña*? In truth, it is killed in the pressing (of soma); when it is performed, it is then engendered; it is born in spreading, it is born in the motion (*yañ-ja*); from this comes its name; *yañ-ja* is the same as *yajña*. (ŚB 3.9.4.23)

The essential character of the sacrifice is indeed its continuity. One does not merely "do" the sacrifice, one extends it, like stretching the warp of a cloth; subtle and quick to evaporate the moment one ceases to watch over it, the power of the sacrifice requires constant attention from the priests. The slightest interruption is fatal. Hence, how many precautions must be taken so that the sacrifice may be "continuous and unbroken!" (AB 2.5.8). Thus, for example, the morning recitation must be performed in the middle of the night, to prevent another voice from preceding it (AB 7.5.11).

> One must prevent the sacrifice from falling apart. Just as, in daily life, knots are tied at both ends of a rope to keep it from unraveling, so too knots are tied at both ends of the sacrifice to keep it from unraveling. (AB 2.5.13-14)

Closely linked to the individual and to circumstances, the sacrifice does not survive except in its results; considered in itself, it dies completely. Thus, the consecrated fires, lit for a specific sacrifice, lose their sacred character once that sacrifice is over (Āpastamba, Paribhāṣasūtras, sūtra 157). To perform a sacrifice, then, is to bring it to life and to kill it.

> In truth, the sacrifice is killed when it is spread; when the soma is pressed, it is killed; when the victim is slain and cut up, it is killed; with the pestle and mortar, with the two

> grinding stones, the oblation is killed. (ŚB 2.2.2.1; repeated at ŚB 4.3.4.1; 1 ŚB 1.1.2.1; and, cf., ŚB 3.9.4.23; GB 2.3.9)[19]

Thus, it is unsurprising, that the sacrifice, restless, tries to flee:

> The sacrifice is of the nature of game (prey) (and the commentary explains this quite clearly: both are inclined to run away); if one walks while concealing oneself, if one holds back the voice, it is to calm it, to avoid frightening it. (TD 6.7.10)

The life of the sacrifice is thus an endless series of deaths and rebirths, and its operation also forms a never-ending cycle.

> It is Bhujyu, the devourer, for it feeds on all that exists. (ŚB 9.4.1.11)

But it is also the universal principle of life:

> Everything that exists, all the gods, have a single principle of life: the sacrifice. (ŚB 9.4.1.11)

> A libation is made into the fire; it is an offering to the gods, and from it the gods live. Then, one eats in the shed; that is an offering to men, and from it men live. The soma cups are placed on the two soma carts; that is an offering to the fathers, and from it the fathers live. (ŚB 3.6.2.25)

Everything that exists is invested in the sacrifice; all beings, so to speak, commune through it.

> Creatures that do not participate in the sacrifice lose everything; but those that have not lost everything, they do participate in the sacrifice: after men come the livestock, after the gods come the birds, the plants, the trees, everything that exists. Thus, the entire universe participates in the sacrifice. The gods and men on one side, the fathers on the other, used to drink together at it; the sacrifice is their shared banquet. In ancient times, they could be seen when they came to the banquet; today, they still attend, but invisibly. (ŚB 3.6.2.26)

Since it is the place where the universe converges, the sacrifice connects earth and heavens. The gods cannot neglect it, for "it is their principle of life" (ŚB 8.6.1.10; ŚB 9.3.2.7; cf., ŚB 14.3.2.1, cited above); "it is their nourishment" (ŚB 8.1.2.10):

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[19] Cf., AB 4.1.1 ff.: "The sacrifice withdrew from the gods, 'I do not wish to be your food,' it said. 'No,' said the gods, 'you shall be our food.' The gods killed it; but once it was cut into pieces, it was not enough for them. Then the gods said: 'In pieces like this, it will not suffice for us; let us reassemble it.' 'Very well,' they said. And so they reassembled it" (reproduced GB 2.2.6).

> The gods subsist on what is offered to them here below, just as men subsist on the gifts that come to them from the celestial world. (TS 3.2.9.7; ŚB 1.2.5.24)

> The sacrifice is the chariot that brings the gods. (AB 10.5.1)

With their appetite always aroused, the gods eagerly await the hour of sacrifice; they rush at it even before it is offered. They do not read the heart of man directly, but at least, "they know the intentions of man" (ŚB 1.1.1.7; ŚB 2.1.4.1; ŚB 2.4.1.11; ŚB 3.4.2.6) through a chain of intermediaries:

> Man forms a decision with his heart; from there, it passes to the breath, from the breath to the wind, and the wind communicates to the gods what is in the heart of man. (ŚB 3.4.2.6-7)

At once, "the gods arrive in the house of the sacrificer at the same time as the priests, for the brahmins are also gods" (MS 1.4.6; GB 2.1.6). Still, the sacrificer must belong to a qualified caste.

> The gods do not interact with just anyone, but only with a brahmin, a *rājanya*, or a *vaiśya*; only they are fit for the sacrifice. (ŚB 3.1.1.10)

Their actual presence in the house naturally imposes a duty of courtesy on the sacrificer, which is fasting.

> Āṣādha Sāvayasa said: "The gods know the heart of man; therefore, they know that such-and-such a person is undertaking a ritual act. They say to themselves, 'Tomorrow, he will offer us a sacrifice.' And so, all the gods arrive at his house; they settle in his house (*upa-vas*); hence the name of the fast: *upavasatha*." Now, it would be improper for a man to eat first when there are other guests in his house who have not yet eaten, how much worse if he were to eat before the gods had eaten! (ŚB 1.1.1.7; repeated at ŚB 2.1.4.1-2)[20]

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[20] Yājñavalkya, it is true, teaches a way to eat without failing in the respect owed to divine guests: "One should eat foods which, though eaten, are not considered as eaten. Anything that is not used for offerings may be eaten without eating before the gods. One may simply eat what grows in the forests" (ŚB 1.1.1.9). Conversely, once the sacrificer has gone through the preliminary ceremonies and has become a god, he must eat the same food as the gods—that is, cooked food (ŚB 3.2.2.10). Fasting, however, is not only a courtesy toward the gods; it is also a blow dealt to the Asuras, especially to the most fearsome of them, Vṛtra, for "the belly is Vṛtra" (TS 2.4.12.6; cf. ŚB 1.6.3.17); "It was with his belly, which was Asurya (demonic), that he pierced these creatures." According to the ŚB, "When one begins the fast for the full moon sacrifice, one should not be completely satiated; for by fasting, one suppresses

But all these gods arrive with competing claims; the great art of sacrifice lies in imposing a hierarchical discipline upon them.

> All the deities surround the priest at the moment he is about to take the offering: "It is for me that he is going to take it! For me!" By naming the divinity, the priest avoids provoking a quarrel among the assembled gods. (ŚB 1.1.2.18)

The benefit, if limited to this, would be modest; but here is the advantage:

> If one names the deity for whom the offering is taken, then all the deities for whom the offering is taken consider it a debt to fulfill the desire for which the offering was made. (ŚB 1.1.2.19)

> If the gods eat, even just once, the food offered to them, then one becomes immortal. (KB 2.8)

Nothing less than the internal power of the sacrifice and the demands of hunger can overcome the repulsion and selfishness that distance the gods from human beings.

> Long ago, the gods and men lived together in the same world. Everything that men lacked, they asked from the gods: "We do not have this! Give it to us!" The gods grew weary of all these demands, and they disappeared. (ŚB 2.3.4.4)

> The Ṛbhus (although they had ascended to heaven) still had the scent of man upon them; the gods were disgusted by their odor and turned away from them. (AB 13.6.4)

Taught by experience about the power of sacrifice—which had raised them to the heavens—the gods strove to hide it from mankind.

> It was through sacrifice that the gods won this victory which is their own. Then they said: "How can we prevent this ascent from being possible for humans?" They sucked the essence of the sacrifice as bees would suck honey, and once they had drawn out all the milk from the sacrifice, they took the sacrificial post and used it to erase the trace of the sacrifice. They turned it upside down, point down, and they disappeared. (ŚB 1.6.2.1; ŚB 3.1.4.3; ŚB 3.2.2.2; ŚB 3.2.2.11; ŚB 3.2.2.28; cf., TS 6.3.4.7; TS 6.5.3.1; MS 3.9.4; AB 6.1.1)

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the belly, which is Asurya...One should begin the fast on the very same day, saying to oneself: 'It is today that I wish to slay Vṛtra'" (ŚB 1.6.3.31-34). Thus, the idea of fasting becomes increasingly refined and moralized; and by the end of the ŚB, the evolution is complete: "Indeed, abstaining from food is the complete form of asceticism" (ŚB 9.5.1.7).

But they had not counted on the cleverness of the ṛṣis; and the ṛṣis uncovered the trick. In a similar precautionary move—but no more successful,

> The gods, reached heaven through the sacrifice of a victim, cut off the head of the victim and let the ritual essence flow out, saying: "This is in case men were to follow us!" (TS 6.3.10.2)

Freed from death by sacrifice, the gods were quick to strike a deal with Death to the detriment of other creatures:

> Death said to the gods: "Then all men will, by the same means, become immortal—what share will I have then?" The gods said: "Let no one after us become immortal with their body. You may take the body as your share, and then, stripped of the body, one may become immortal." (ŚB 10.4.3.9)

Since sacrifice is the secret to the gods' success, the law of sacrifice is to imitate the gods.

> Sacrifice still exists today just as the gods performed it. (ŚB 1.5.3.23)

> Thus, the gods acted; thus, men act. (TB 1.5.9.4)

One does exactly what the gods did, saying to oneself, "Since the gods did this, I must do it too" (ŚB 8.5.1.7; similarly, ŚB 7.2.1.4; ŚB 7.3.2.6; ŚB 7.5.25; ŚB 9.2.3.4; ŚB 2.6.13; ŚB 2.6.2.2). From this principle follows a necessary consequence; since sacrifice is a divine act and has as its aim the transformation of man into a god, everything that is properly human is contrary to it. To imitate the gods is, at the same time, to leave behind human conditions.

> Everything that is human is opposed to the success of the sacrifice; one says: "I do not want to do anything that would hinder success in the sacrifice". (ŚB 1.2.2.9; repeated, ŚB 1.7.2.9; ŚB 3.2.2.15; ŚB 3.3.4.31)

It is based on this principle that the priest must present to the sacrificer, during the preliminary ceremonies, the fasting food, which is milk:

> ...but only after the usual time has passed; milk drawn in the evening is given to him after midnight; milk drawn in the morning is given after midday; this is to make a distinction; in doing so, he distinguishes what is divine from what is human. (ŚB 3.2.2.16)

Likewise, when ploughing the ground for the *āhavanīya* altar:

> They first yoke the beast on the right, and then the one on the left; such is the custom among the gods; it is the reverse among men. (ŚB 7.2.2.6)

> One must not make a cake too large; if it were large, it would be in the human way. (ŚB 1.2.2.9)
>
> One must cut off just enough; if one cut off a large piece, it would be in the human way. (ŚB 1.7.2.9)

During the preliminary ceremonies:

> One first cuts the nails of the right hand; in human practice, one starts with the left hand; but among the gods, it is as prescribed. One first cuts the nails of the thumbs; in human practice, one begins with the little finger; but among the gods, it is as prescribed. One first combs the right-side whiskers; in human practice, one begins with the left sideburn; but among the gods, it is as prescribed. (ŚB 3.1.2.4-5)
>
> One applies ointment first to the right eye; in human practice, one begins with the left eye; but among the gods, it is as prescribed. (ŚB 3.1.3.14; TS 6.1.1.5; MS 3.6.3)

The opposition between the human world and the divine world is so strong that:

> What is "no" for the gods is "yes" for men". (AB 3.5.19; repeated but softened by *iva*, AB 6.2.15)

To do as the gods do, one must, like them, reach heaven.

> The sacrifice has only one solid foundation, only one dwelling place: the heavenly world. (ŚB 8.7.4.6)
>
> The sacrifice is a reliable boat for crossing over. (AB 3.2.29)
>
> The sacrifice, in its entirety, is the ship that leads to heaven. (ŚB 4.2.5.10)

The comparison is so striking that the Brāhmaṇas delight in expanding upon it:

> Truly, the daily oblation into the fire is the ship that leads to heaven; of this ship, which leads to heaven, the *āhavanīya* fire and the *gārhapatya* fire are the two sides; and the helmsman is the one who performs the milk oblations. Now, when he moves toward the east, he then steers his ship toward the east, in the direction of heaven; with his ship he gains the heavenly world. If he boards it from the north, it carries him all the way into the heavenly world; but if he comes from the south and remains there, it is like a traveler who arrives when the ship has already sailed; he remains on land and outside the ship. (ŚB 2.3.3.15-16)
>
> Just as one would embark to go out to sea, so do those embark who hold a ritual session of a year or twelve days; but just as one boards a well-equipped ship when one wants to reach the other shore, so does one board these hymns (AB 29.5.10).

> Indeed, the two melodies, the *bṛhat* and the *rathaṃtara*, are the two ships that carry the sacrifice across...one must not abandon both at the same time; if both were abandoned together, it would be like a boat that has broken its moorings and would then float drifting from shore to shore; one would drift thus, from shore to shore, if both were abandoned at once. (AB 17.7.1-4; cf., also, AB 27.3.6; and, ŚB 4.2.5.10)

The mechanism of the sacrifice is clearly represented by the rite of *dūrohaṇa*, the "difficult ascent." It consists of two periods: one ascending, the other descending. The goal is first to raise the sacrificer to the celestial world; but the earth has its charms, and the sacrificer does not wish to leave it too soon. Assured of future immortality by the first operation, he regains his place among the living through the second operation.

> After the invocation, one makes the ascent of the *dūrohaṇa*; the *dūrohaṇa* is the celestial world. One recites first with a pause at each quarter-verse; in this way, one arrives at this world. Then one recites with a pause at each half-verse; thus, one arrives at the atmosphere. Then one recites with a pause after the three-quarters of the verse; in this way, one reaches that other world. Then one recites the verse all in one go; thus, one firmly sets foot in the sun that shines above. One then performs the reverse of the ascent, like someone who grasps a branch; one recites with a pause after three-quarters of the verse and thus sets foot firmly in that other world. Then one recites with a pause at each half-verse, and sets foot in the atmosphere. Then one recites with a pause at each quarter-verse and sets foot here below. Thus, the sacrificer who has reached the celestial world sets foot firmly once more in this world. But if one desires only a single world—the celestial world—the priest must perform only the rite of ascent. Then one conquers the celestial world, but one no longer remains long in this world. (AB 18.7; TMB 5.5.4-5; TMB 18.10.10)

Another rite expresses the same conception with equal clarity; its very name is strikingly symbolic. It is called "the steps of Viṣṇu," and according to the unanimous doctrine of the Brāhmaṇas, Viṣṇu is the sacrifice.

> Then one performs the steps of Viṣṇu. The one who sacrifices pleases the gods with this sacrifice...having pleased the gods, he is admitted into their company. Admitted into their company, he walks forward to join them...Thus, he rises up to those worlds and establishes himself there, he sets foot there firmly. He must then return and descend again...thus he first victoriously conquers the heavens, leaving the path open; then he does the same for the atmosphere; then, since he does not leave an exit to escape from here below, he definitively pushes back his rivals. (ŚB 1.9.3.8-11)

The arrangement of the verses in the liturgy corresponds to the needs of this journey, both mystical and real.

> With nine verses, the *maitrāvaruṇa* priest transports the sacrificer from this world to the world of the atmosphere; with ten verses, from the world of the atmosphere to that other world; with nine verses, from that other world to the celestial world. Truly, those who recite the verses seven by seven cannot transport the sacrificer to the celestial world. (AB 28.1.10-12)

And,

> The metres are arranged. Just as here below one travels by relays, taking each time fresh horses or oxen that are less tired, so too one goes to heaven by relays, taking each time new metres that are less worn. (AB 19.5.4)

This prodigious power of the sacrifice is inexhaustible; it is eternal.

> Every day the sacrifice is extended; every day it is complete; every day it joins the sacrificer to the life of the celestial world; every day, through sacrifice, the sacrificer goes to heaven. (ŚB 9.4.4.15)

But, in order to transmit this ascensional power between the sacrifice and the sacrificer, a kind of transmission is needed: it is the *dakṣiṇā*, the gift or payment made to the priests.

> The sacrifice that he offers moves toward the world of the gods; following it goes the *dakṣiṇā* he gives; then the sacrificer holds on to the *dakṣiṇā*. (ŚB 1.9.3.1; repeated ŚB 4.3.4.6)

The action of the *dakṣiṇā* is not exercised solely upon the sacrificer; the sacrifice itself draws efficacy from it; and to it that it is revived after each killing.

> The sacrifice, having been slain, no longer moved; the gods revived. (*dakṣ*) it with *dakṣiṇā*(s); hence, their name. (ŚB 2.2.2.2)

The question of the *dakṣiṇā* is treated in the Brāhmaṇas from the priests' point of view, and thus its importance. Gold, cows, garments, and horses are the four recognized forms of payment (ŚB 4.3.4.7). The value must correspond to the importance of the sacrifice: a soma sacrifice requires a *dakṣiṇā* of at least one hundred cows (ŚB 4.3.4.3); the *trirātra* demands a thousand (ŚB 4.5.8.1); and the distribution must follow precise regulations (ŚB 4.3.4.24-33). Woe to anyone who dares neglect it!

> The Āptya sages pass on their sin to anyone who performs a sacrifice without the *dakṣiṇā*. (ŚB 1.2.3.4)

And the sin of the Āptyas is no light burden: they are the ones responsible for the crime committed by Indra when he killed Viśvarūpa, the three headed son of Tvaṣṭṛ (ŚB 1.2.3.2-3).

The ascent of the sacrificer to heaven, as it is explained in the Brāhmaṇas, is not an empty fantasy of the priestly imagination; it is logically consistent with the cosmological system described in these ancient texts. There are three worlds: the earth, the atmosphere or the realms of the air, and the heaven where the gods reside. True to a fundamental trait of the Hindu mind, the Brāhmaṇas reserve space for the unknowable.

> Beyond these three worlds, is there a fourth or not? That is uncertain. (ŚB 1.2.1.12; repeated: ŚB 1.2.4.21; and cf., ŚB 1.2.4.12)

Each world rests on a solid foundation.

> Hiraṇyadan Baida said: "The sky is founded on the atmosphere, the atmosphere on the earth, the earth on the waters, the waters on truth, truth on sacred knowledge, sacred knowledge on asceticism." (AB 11.6.4)

But the worlds are not unmovable by nature.

> The worlds lacked solidity, lacked stability. Prajapati considered: "How can these worlds be made solid and stable?" With mountains and rivers, he consolidated the earth; with birds and rays, the atmosphere; with clouds and stars, the sky. (ŚB 11.8.1)

Before they became distinct as they are today, the worlds were almost indistinguishable.

> The worlds were very close to one another; one could touch the sky by raising one's hands. The gods had a desire: "How can we make these worlds more spacious, so that we may have more room?" They uttered three syllables: *vī-ta-ye* ("for expansion"), and the worlds moved apart, and the gods had more space. (ŚB 1.4.1.22-33)

Even earlier, the union was more intimate still.

> The two worlds were together; they separated; it stopped raining, it stopped getting hot; creatures could no longer understand one another. The gods brought the two worlds back together; as they drew near again, they contracted this divine marriage. (AB 19.5.5; TMB 7.10.1; TMB 8.1.9)

Today, "the two worlds touch only at the edges" (ŚB 3.2.1.2).

The general configuration of the world varies from one school to another. One teaches that "the universe has the same dimensions in height as in width" (TMB 18.6.3); another that "the highest worlds are the widest, the lowest are the narrowest" (AB 4.8.6). But this matters little: the essential aspect is to ascend to the sky like the birds (TMB 5.1.10; TMB 5.3.5); for, "if this world here below is good, the world above is even better" (AB 3.2.3). The path to be traveled is long, "so long that one reaches the end with difficulty" (TMB 9.4.16), and, "It takes six months

to go, six months to come back" (TMB 4.16.7). Elsewhere, the distance is reduced to the total height of a thousand cows stacked one on top of the other (TMB 16.8.6; TMB 21.1.9). But in truth, both estimations are merely intellectual exercises to demonstrate the effectiveness of two particular sacrifices. Another passage from the same Brāhmaṇa counts forty-four days of travel on horseback to go from here to the sky (TMB 25.10.16), while another Brāhmaṇa estimates the distance at a thousand days' journey on horseback (AB 7.7.8). The Brahmanic schools did not concern themselves with fixing the exact length of the path.

The true journey to the heavens only takes place after death; man then ascends to enjoy the immortality that the sacrifice guarantees him. It is asked, "By what chain of causes and effects does the sacrificer triumph over repeated death?" (ŚB 10.1.4.14); but the positive fact remains: "That one who knows thus victoriously drives away repeated death; he goes toward a complete life" (ŚB 10.2.6.9; ŚB 10.6.1.4; ŚB 11.4.3.20; cf., ŚB 10.5.1.4; ŚB 11.5.6.9). The benefit even extends to the herds as well as to the sacrificer's ancestors (ŚB 12.9.3.11-12). But, if we consider only the individual, the profit is twofold; it affects both present life and the life to come:

Immortality for man is to live a full life and to be happy. (TMB 24.19.2)

A full life is "an existence that days and nights do not exhaust before old age" (ŚB 10.4.3.1). The definition can be made even more precise:

> He who lives a hundred years or more, that one attains immortality. (ŚB 10.2.6.8)
>
> A hundred years is immortality, the infinite, the unlimited. (ŚB 10.1.5.4)

Between the duration of earthly life and that of celestial life, a fixed relation is established:

> Those who die below the age of twenty are assigned to the days and nights as their proper world; those who die above twenty and below forty are assigned to the half-months; those who die above forty and below sixty, to the months; those who die above sixty and below eighty, to the seasons; those who die above eighty and below one hundred, to the year; those who live one hundred years or more attain immortality. (ŚB 10.2.6.8)

This established relation may perhaps be based on the nutritional value of the sacrifices performed, for elsewhere we find indicated a sort of posthumous nutritional coefficient assigned to various sacrifices.

> The one who has offered the daily oblation into the fire, in the other world, he eats in the evening and in the morning; such is the nutritional value attached to that sacrifice. If one has offered the new moon and full moon sacrifices, every half-month; if one has offered the four-monthly (seasonal) sacrifices, every four months; if one has offered an

> animal victim, every six months; if one has offered a soma sacrifice, every year; and if one has built a brick fire altar, he eats at will, either every hundred years or not at all. (ŚB 10.1.5.4)

The need to eat is, naturally, in inverse relation to vital energy, for "hunger is death" (ŚB 10.6.5.1). Sacrifice, therefore, is immortality, because it is ambrosia, the food of immortality. The drink of immortality that the gods and the asuras seek in the depths of the cosmic ocean and for which they fiercely contend in epic legends is *amṛta*, the nourishment of immortality that the sacrifice draws from the ritual waters. For "the waters are immortality" (MS 4.1.9; GB 2.1.2) or again, "immortality is soma," the sacrificial drink (ŚB 9.5.1.8).

Immortality, which is life everlasting in heaven, stands in contrast to "repeated death" (*punar-mṛtyu*). Repeated death does not evoke, for the authors of the Brāhmaṇas, the idea of transmigration that seems inevitably associated with it in the philosophical systems. "Repeated death" is nothing other than a "second death"; it is the horizon barely opened onto those dizzying depths that India still delights in contemplating with a kind of exquisite dread. But the gaze of the Brāhmaṇas, less curious or less refined, does not reach so far. The dead are divided into two categories: the immortals, who will not die again; and the others, who will die once more. Even this limited perspective suffices to create a contrast; to intensify it, it is enough to repeat the word "again," and in doing so, both the expression and the idea extend into the infinite. The method is simple; yet examples are rare, so rare that I have found only one.

> Those who know thus, or who perform this ceremony, when they die, they are reborn; and being reborn, they are born into immortality. But those who do not know thus, or who do not perform this ceremony, when they die, they are reborn and become again and again the prey of death. (ŚB 10.4.3.10)

The dead person, who has gained immortality through sacrifice, must first abandon his bodily shell, which a divine pact does not allow him to take with him; then he begins the ascent to the heavens. The path is not without difficulties; the dead must beware both of going astray and of dangerous obstacles.

> The path leads either to the gods or to the fathers. Now, on both sides, there are two ridges of flame standing tall and burning; they burn the one whom their flames are meant to stop, but they allow to pass the one who has the right to go through. (ŚB 1.9.3.2)

The host of gods known as the Ādityas also watches over the approaches to heaven.

> Those who guard the paths leading to the gods are the Ādityas; they push back anyone who wishes to enter. (MS 1.6.12)

But the true barrier of heaven is the sun, who is the Āditya par excellence.

> That one who shines above, he is Death; and because he is Death, the creatures beneath him die; those who are above are the gods, and that is why they are immortal. And if, on a whim, he (the sun) takes the vital breath of a person at his rising, that person dies; and anyone who goes to the other world without having escaped the sun, who is Death, then, just as in this world no account is taken of a man in chains and he is killed at will, so too, in that other world, the sun causes him to die again and again. (ŚB 2.3.3.7-8)

It is clear that the gods spared no effort to secure such a precious guardian. It was they who transported him from the earth to the heights above.

> In the beginning, the sun was here below; the gods transported him from here below to the world above. (MS 3.9.3; MS 2.2.2; ŚB 4.2.5.9; TMB 4.5.3; TMB 6.7.24)

The sun was at first seized by a kind of nostalgia.

> Once he had passed into the world above, he longed to return to this world below; but when he arrived in this world, he became afraid of death, for this world is, so to speak, associated with death. He sang hymns in honor of Agni; Agni made him ascend again to the heavenly world. (TS 1.5.9.3; TS 7.3.10.1)

To prevent the return of such desires, which could compromise their security, the gods took many precautions.

> The gods feared that the sun might go beyond the sky; they reinforced him with hymns to make him stay in place. The gods feared that the sun might fall back below the sky, so they held him up with radiant tresses. (TB 1.2.4.2; TMB 4.5.9-11; AB 18.4.6; AB 18.5.3)

The rays of the sun, being the path to heaven, are confounded with the dead who follow them.

> The rays of the one who shines above are the pious men; and the light that shines beyond is either Prajāpati or the heavenly world. (ŚB 1.9.3.10)

Since the path of the righteous is luminous, it is also recognized in the stars.

> The pious men who go to heaven, the heavenly lights are their radiance. (ŚB 6.5.4.8)

If the dead do not take the path of the gods, they then follow the path of the fathers. The fathers are the dead, but dead who have remained mortal; they have not cast off evil (ŚB 2.1.3.4). Their dwelling is mysterious:

> They live in the third world from here. (TB 1.3.10.5; TB 1.8.6.6)

They are incorporeal; they are spirits (TMB 6.9.19-20). Placed between the gods and men, they logically correspond, in the system of equivalences found in the Brāhmaṇas, either to the seasons (ŚB 2.6.1.32; TB 1.3.10.3), which are the intermediate stage between the year (symbol of time and divine life) and the day (symbol of ephemeral existence and human life)—or to the regions of the air (ŚB 2.6.1.11) situated between the earth of men and the heaven of the gods. The original nature of the fathers is poorly defined. Sometimes they are depicted as originating from Prajāpati at the moment of creation, after the asuras but before the gods.

> After having emitted the asuras, Prajapati felt that he was a father; he then created the fathers; hence their name. (MS 4.1.2; TB 2.3.8.2)

At other times, the fathers are described as gods who died and were later brought back to life.

> The gods killed Vṛtra and thus achieved their ultimate victory; those among them who had been struck down in the battle, they brought back to life through sacrifice; they became the fathers. (ŚB 2.6.1.1)

Born from, or elder to, the gods, the fathers appear to be in perpetual hostility with them.

> The gods and the fathers were in this world; everything the gods possessed for themselves; Yama (the chief of the fathers) would take from them. (MS 2.5.3)

The intervention of Prajāpati rescues the gods. Elsewhere, sacrifice deserts the gods to follow the fathers, and the gods are forced to accept a division of the offerings (TB 1.3.10.1). In regard to men, the fathers behave as superior beings. When offering the funeral cake to the fathers, one must turn away his face; otherwise, the fathers, out of dignity, would not come to eat it (TB 1.3.10.6), just as today, high-ranking individuals do not allow themselves to be seen while eating. It is wise to treat them with care, for their ill will is easily aroused, and their anger is formidable.

> If the fathers come to the sacrifice, either they take a male or they give one. One cuts the fringes of the garment for them, because the fathers take as their share whatever they seize; thus, their share is given to the fathers. In old age (after fifty years), one cuts the hair for them, because one is then closer to the fathers. (TB 1.3.10.7)

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa brings together, in a clear and concise summary, all the reasons that justify the rites in honor of the fathers.

> If one performs this rite, it is to prevent them (the fathers) from coming to kill someone; it is also because one says to oneself: "The gods have done it, so we must do it"; and in this way, one gives them the share that the gods have regularly granted

> them; it is an act of goodwill toward those whom the gods have brought back to life; it is to elevate one's own fathers to a better world; it is to repair the losses and damages incurred through one's misconduct. These are the reasons for this sacrifice. (ŚB 2.6.1.3)

Before the fork in the road where the dead receive their final destination, they undergo a trial that recalls the ordeal by weighing, a concept recognized and regulated by legal codes and likely inspired by them.

> One is placed on the scales in the other world; whichever side outweighs, that one is followed, good or evil. (ŚB 11.2.7.33)

However, terms of morality must never mislead when reading the Brāhmaṇas. The authors of these priestly compilations see and assess actions only from the ritualistic point of view. A good act is one that conforms to the prescriptions of the cult; a bad act is one that transgresses those prescriptions. A curious eschatological legend, common to two Brāhmaṇas, clearly conveys the meaning attached to these two terms and illustrates, with vivid examples, the nature of punishments and rewards after death.[21]

> Bhṛgu, son of Varuṇa, was studying the sacred science. He believed himself to be above his father, above the gods, above the other brahmins who study the sacred science. But, Varuṇa thought: "My son knows nothing. I must teach him." He seized his vital breaths; Bhrgu fell unconscious. Being unconscious, he went to the distant world; he arrived in the other world. A man was devouring another man whom he had cut into pieces. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?" They said to him: "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." In a second place, he arrived at a man eating another man who was crying out for help. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?" They said: "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." In a third place, he came upon a man devouring another man who remained silent and said not a word. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?"

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[21] JB 1.42-44 (Oertel, *JAOS* XV, 234-238, provides the text along with an English translation). The same episode appears in ŚB 11.6.1.1 ff. (German translation by Weber, *Indische Streifen* I, 24). I do not think it useful to reproduce the text of these two lengthy narratives here; however, it will not be superfluous to point out the main differences between them. In the ŚB, Varuṇa simply sends Bhṛgu on a journey to cure him of his pride. Bhṛgu successively visits the four cardinal directions and one of the intermediate regions; he sees only five scenes instead of the six described in the JB. The two rivers—one of blood and the other of butter—and the five heavenly rivers are missing from the ŚB. Also, the black man is moved directly from the episode of the two rivers to that of the two women. However, the first scene in the JB is split into two in the ŚB. There, Bhṛgu first encounters men who are chopping (*saṃvraścam*), and then men who are cutting (*saṃkartam*). Thus, the two versions are clearly independent from one another.

> They said: "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." In a fourth place, he came to two women guarding a great treasure. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?" They said: "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." In a fifth place, he reached a river of blood and a river of butter that flowed side by side. The river of blood was guarded by a black man, completely naked, armed with a club. From the river of butter, golden men drew all their desires with golden cups. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?" They said: "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." In a sixth place, he arrived at five rivers filled with blooming blue and white lotuses, where streams of honey flowed, and there were dances, songs, lutes resonating, bands of Apsaras, a delightful fragrance, and a great noise. He said: "Oh! Is this possible? What is this?" They said, "Ask your father Varuṇa, he will tell you." He returned from there. He arrived before his father Varuṇa, who said to him: "You have come, my son?" "Yes, I have come, father." Bhṛgu then reports the spectacles he has witnessed to Varuṇa, and Varuṇa gives him their explanation: "What did you see, my son?" "A man devouring another whom he had cut into pieces." Varuṇa said, "Those who, in this world, cut down trees and throw them into the fire without offering the daily oblation to the fire, without knowing thus, those trees, in the other world, take human form and devour them in turn." "How can one escape that?" "If one burns wood according to the rite, one escapes it, one is freed."

The interpretations continue in the same spirit, always with a ritual sanction attached: The second pair Bhṛgu met shows the revenge of animals on men who killed and ate them without performing the proper rites. The third represents the revenge of plants consumed in the same negligent way. The two women are Śraddhā (Faith) and Aśraddhā (Lack of Faith). The river of blood is the blood of a slain brahmin; the black man is Wrath. The river of butter is formed by the ritual waters. The five rivers are the worlds of Varuṇa. The conclusion is stark and forceful:

> Whoever, knowing thus, offers the daily oblation to the fire, in the other world, trees do not eat him in human form, nor do animals, nor do rice and barley. His sacrifices and pious acts do not go to *śraddhā* and *aśraddhā*. He avoids the river of blood; he reaches the river of butter.

If the gods' pact with death forbids the human body from entering the heavenly world, then the promises of sacrifice risk becoming illusory. The effort may be spent in vain. The sacrificer, pulled upward by ascensional force and downward by gravity, risks remaining, like Triśaṅku of legend, suspended between heaven and earth. But here *dīkṣā* intervenes. *Dīkṣā* is a set of preliminary ceremonies which serve to deify the human creature.

> Truly, he who performs the *dīkṣā* is on his way toward the gods; he becomes one of the divinities. (ŚB 3.1.1.8; SB 3.1.4.1; MS 3.6.1; ŚB 3.2.2.30; GB 1.3.19)[22]

> The human realm is separate from the divine realm; the ceremony carries the sacrificer beyond the human world; he departs from this world, he who performs the *dīkṣā*. (MS 3.6.1; TS 6.1.1)

The process consists of constructing a new body for the sacrificer; almost all the practices are symbols of conception and birth. During the ceremony:

> He covers his head. Indeed, the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā* becomes an embryo; and embryos are covered by the two membranes of the amnion and the chorion—this is why the head is covered. (ŚB 3.2.1.16; TS 6.1.3.2; AB 1.3.1)

After this:

> He uncovers the head. Indeed, the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā* becomes an embryo; embryos are covered by the two membranes of the amnion and the chorion; now he is born, and that is why he uncovers his head. (ŚB 3.3.3.12)

A hemp belt is worn underneath the garment:

> Indeed, the amnion lies beneath the chorion; this is why the belt is worn beneath the garment. Just as Prajāpati, having become an embryo, was born from this sacrifice, so too, having become an embryo, he is born from this sacrifice. (ŚB 3.2.1.11)

A special shelter is erected for the sacrificer undergoing the *dīkṣā*; he is given a black antelope skin to wear.

> The shelter is his womb; the black antelope skin is the chorion; the garment is the amnion; the belt is the umbilical cord: the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā* is an embryo. (MS 3.6.7)

Even moving around at specific times follows this same logic:

> The fire is the womb of the sacrifice; the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā* is the embryo. Now, the embryo moves around inside the womb. Just as the sacrificer sometimes moves, sometimes turns around, in the same way embryos sometimes move and sometimes turn. (ŚB 3.1.3.28)

The fists are kept clenched:

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[22] The pseudo-etymological interpretation of dīkṣā is obscure: ŚB 3.2.2.30; GB 1.3.19.

> Indeed, he becomes an embryo, the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā*; that is why he keeps his fists clenched—because embryos keep their fists clenched. (ŚB 3.2.1.6)

One must not scratch oneself with a piece of wood or with a nail:

> Indeed, he becomes an embryo, the one who undergoes the *dīkṣā*; and if one were to scratch an embryo with a piece of wood or with a nail, it would cause a fatal miscarriage. (ŚB 3.2.1.31)

One of the Brāhmaṇas gives a concise summary of the main acts of the *dīkṣā* along with their interpretation:

> The priests transform into an embryo the one to whom they give the *dīkṣā*. They sprinkle him with water; water is the male seed; they thus give him the *dīkṣā* by giving him the seed. They anoint his eyes with ointment; the ointment is vitality for the eyes; they thus give him the *dīkṣā* by giving him vitality. They make him enter the special shelter; the shelter is the womb for the one undergoing *dīkṣā*; they thus make him enter the womb that is meant for him. They cover him with a garment...the garment is the amnion for the one undergoing the *dīkṣā*; thus, they cover him with the amnion. A black antelope skin is placed over it; for indeed, the chorion is above the amnion; thus, they cover him with the chorion. His fists are clenched; for indeed, the embryo keeps its fists clenched while in the womb; the child is born with clenched fists...He removes the antelope skin before entering the ritual bath; and that is why embryos are born without the chorion. He keeps his garment on to enter the bath, and that is why a child is born with the amnion still upon him. (AB 1.3)

Thanks to these rites, the sacrificer is considered to possess two bodies: one material and mortal, the other ritual and immortal. The first is intended to serve as a sacrificial victim:

> He who performs the *dīkṣā* sacrifices his own person as a victim to all the gods. (AB 6.3.9)

> He who has undergone the *dīkṣā* is slain as a ritual victim by all the gods. (AB 6.9.6)

> He who undergoes the *dīkṣā* becomes food offered to the gods. (ŚB 3.3.4.21)

Naturally, the sacrificer is redeemed later through another rite; but in order to present his body as an acceptable offering to the gods, he must eliminate the impurities that defile it. For this reason:

> He shaves his head and beard; he clips his nails, for the hair and beard are dead skin, unfit for offering. Thus, he casts off the dead skin that is unfit for sacrifice, and, having become worthy of the ritual, he possesses within himself ritual purity. (TS 6.1.1.2)[23]

Transformed by ritual virtue, the body acquires superhuman power, for the sacrifice resides within it.

> Through the *dīkṣā*, the entire body is surrounded by an aura of flames. (TS 7.9.4.1)

> If one must keep silent, it is because speech itself is the sacrifice, and to speak is to carry the sacrifice within oneself. And if one were to speak when silence is required, the sacrifice would escape and turn away from him. (ŚB 3.2.1.38; TS 6.1.4.3; MS 3.6.8)

The power thus obtained acts with a brutal and fatal force, like all the forces of sacrifice; it strikes down all that opposes it.

> He who undergoes *dīkṣā*, his share of sin is divided into three: if one eats his food, they take a third; if one speaks ill of him, they take a third; if ants bite him, they take a third. (MS 3.6.7; TMB 5.6.10; GB 1.3.19)

In sum, *dīkṣā* is a second birth, a regeneration that makes a man into a god.

> Man is only partially born; it is through sacrifice that he is truly brought into the world. (MS 3.6.7)

The funerary ceremonies, which cause the final ascension to heaven, can be considered—similar to the *dīkṣā*—as one of the phases of generation.

> Truly, man is born three times: first, he is born of his father and mother; then, when he sacrifices, what the sacrifice makes of him is his second birth; finally, when he dies and is laid in the fire, and is born from it, that is his third birth. And that is why it is said that man is born three times. (ŚB 11.2.1.1)

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[23] TMB 4.9.22 gives a similar explanation of the practice: "One shaves the crown of the head; in doing so, one removes evil from oneself, saying: 'Thus lightened, may we go to the heavenly world.'" ŚB 2.6.3.14-17 reports divergent opinions about the significance of this practice: "The sun and fire have their face in all directions; man, however, has his face in only one direction. By shaving the head, he too gains a face in all directions, and like the sun and fire, he has food to eat and to plant. Knowing thus, he shaves his head. Therefore, one should shave the head. But Asuri objected: 'What has that got to do with the face, even if one shaves all the hair? If he performs the sacrifice three times a year, only then does he truly have a face in all directions, and only then does he always have food and crops to consume. Therefore, one should not concern oneself with shaving the head.'"

The idea of generation through ritual, accepted in both theory and practice, inevitably led to the real or symbolic reproduction of sexual functions. The Brāhmaṇas paved the way for the pious obscenities of the Tantras. If, during the course of a recitation, the priest separates the first two quarters of a verse and brings the other two closely together, it is because the woman spreads her thighs and the man presses them together during the sexual act; thus, the priest symbolically represents the act of union so that the sacrifice may yield a numerous progeny (AB 10.3.2-4). The lowered voice of the *hotar* is an emission of semen; when the *hotar* addresses the sacramental call to the *adhvaryu*, the latter gets on all fours and turns his face away, because quadrupeds turn their backs to each other when emitting semen (AB 10.6.1-6). Then, the *adhvaryu* straightens up and faces the *hotar*; for, bipeds face one another during the emission of semen. It would be easy to multiply the examples (see., e.g., AB 10.7; AB 13.11; AB 28.1.4-5; AB 30.1.7; ŚB 1.1.1.20-21), but such insistence is unnecessary. However, it is worth recalling the brutish rite that concludes the year-long ritual session; in order to restore the virile force that a year of continence has driven away from the sacrificer, a man and a woman copulate within the consecrated ground (TS 7.5.9.4; Kāṭh 34.5).[24]

There is an intimate and natural connection between *dīkṣā* and *śraddhā*:

> *Śraddhā* is a form of *dīkṣā*. (ŚB 12.8.2.4; ŚB 14.6.9.22)
>
> It is with *śraddhā* that the gods fashioned the *dīkṣā*. (ŚB 12.1.2.1; cf., GB 1.4.7; GB 1.5.24)

A marvelous legend—which stands out starkly against the otherwise neutral and drab tone of the Kaiṣītaki Brāhmaṇa—links the two terms, culminating in the exaltation of *śraddhā*.

> Let us now speak of the *dīkṣā* according to Keśin. Now, Keśin Dārbhya had undergone the *dīkṣā* and was seated. A golden bird flew toward him and said: "You do not truly have the *dīkṣā*; I know the *dīkṣā*; do you want me to teach it to you?" "When the sacrifice is performed once and for all, I fear its effects may not be lasting. Do you know how to ensure the permanence of a sacrifice done once and for all? If so, tell me." He said: "Very well." And they began to talk. Now, it was either he, or Ula Vārṣṇivṛddha, or Iṭan Kāvya, or even Śikhaṇḍin Yājñasena, or anyone else. And the bird then presents the rite in its own way. But Kauṣītakin says: "One must not perform these oblations (the ones the bird spoke of), for they would be excessive oblations...It is *śraddhā* that is the infinite duration of the sacrifice; if one sacrifices with *śraddhā*, the sacrifice that has been

[24] The Śrautasūtras of Śāṅkhāyana describe the rite, but add: "This is a thing of ancient times, no longer in use; it should not be performed" (cf., Ind Stud X, 125).

> performed is never lost." (KB 7.4; *sic* Weber, *Indische Studien* II, 308, otherwise, Lindner, ed.)

Śraddhā is faith.[25] But to whom is this faith directed, the faith that ensures such splendid fruits for the sacrificer? The interpretation given by the Brāhmaṇas leaves no doubt about the creed of the true believer. *Śraddhā* is frequently associated with *satya*, which means truth (AB 32.9.4; ŚB 11.3.1.1; ŚB 12.1.3.23).[26]

> "At that time, nothing existed," said Yājñavalkya to Janaka, "truth was offered in libation into faith". (ŚB 11.3.1.4)

> We have trust in a witness who says, "I saw it," because the eye is truth. (AB 1.6.11; ŚB 1.3.1.27; MS 3.6.3)

> Faith and truth, that is the finest pair. (AB 32.9.4)

Faith and truth are so closely linked that they are easily confused. An oath taken in sincerity is said to be taken "with faith" (AB 39.1.3). The waters are faith (MS 1.4.10; MS 4.1.4; TS 1.6.8.1), just as they are truth. Faith is so little directed toward the gods that they themselves grant or withhold it, just as men do.

> The one who offers a sacrifice without first binding himself firmly to faith, his sacrifice does not inspire faith. But if one offers a sacrifice by first firmly attaching oneself to faith, then the gods and men alike have faith in that sacrifice. (TS 1.6.8.1; MS 4.1.4; cf., MS 1.4.10)

So, it is the sacrifice that faith is directed toward, but not only the sacrifice, the priest also shares in it. Faith in the operation requires faith in the officiant.

> Vatsaprī Bhālandana could not obtain faith for himself; he performed intense austerities; he beheld the Vātsapra melody; he gained faith for himself. (TMB 12.11.25)

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[25] [Tr. Note: Lévi's "La çraddha, c'est la confiance" would be in literal translation, "confidence." I have followed the common convention of translating *śraddhā*" as "faith,' as found generally in English translation of the Brāhmaṇas.]

[26] [Tr. Note: Lévi's "La çraddha est fréquemment associée au satya, qui est l'exactitude" would be in literal translation, "exactness." I have followed the common convention of translating *satya* as "truth," as found generally in English translation of the Brāhmaṇas.]

> The ṛṣis insulted Vatsaprī Bhālandana and called him, "Impostor!" He perceived the hymn, and by that, he triumphantly repelled their insults. (MS 3.2.2; cf., TS 5.2.1.6; ŚB 6.7.4.1)

From the moment Vatsaprī justified his knowledge of the sacrifice through the creation of a liturgical melody, the faith that had been denied to him came to him spontaneously. Bṛhaspati, the divine priest of the gods, also needed to inspire faith in order to fulfill his priestly duties:

> Bṛhaspati had a desire: "May the gods have trust in me! May I become their priest!" He discovered the rite that secures priestly functions, the gods had faith in him; he became their priest. (TS 7.4.1.1)

Even the cows, who take part in the sacrifice like all creatures, came to understand, through experience, the value of faith.

> The cows held a ritual session; they had no horns and wished to have them. Some of them remained in session for ten months, and horns then grew for them. They said: "We have succeeded. Let us end the session! We have obtained what we wished to gain through our session." But there were some (whether it was half of them or an undetermined number) who said, "Let us therefore continue the session for the remaining two months to complete twelve; at the end of the year, we shall conclude the session!" In the twelfth month, their horns just sprouted—whether by the effect of faith or the lack of faith. These are the cows that are without horns. All of them succeeded in their own way; some gained horns; others acquired the strength of nourishment. (TS 7.5.1.2.1-2; TS 7.5.1.1; TMB 4.1.1-2; AB 18.3.2-3)

The case merited the attention of theologians. The first group (of cows), confident in the achieved result of the sacrifice, ended the session as soon as the expected outcome appeared. But as for the others, who continued with the rites, should they be considered faithful or faithless? No doubt, encouraged by the initial success, they extended the ritual session in the hope of obtaining even greater rewards; and they did succeed, since they gained the ability to nourish. Yet at the same time, their lack of contentment led to a loss of a benefit, and their horns remained undeveloped. True faith is expressed in the words of the wise and famed King Janamejaya Pārikṣita:

> Here is what Janamejaya Pārikṣita said, as one who truly knows: "For me, who knows thus, it is priests who know thus that perform the sacrifice, and that is why I triumph over an invading army, I triumph with an invading army; neither divine weapons nor human weapons can harm me; I shall live a full life, and I shall be master of the entire earth." (AB 37.7.9)

To “know thus”—to possess both the theory and the practice—is the key to success and the foundation of faith.

> Just as is the oblation of the devotee who has such faith, so is the oblation of the one who knows thus. (KB 2.8)

Hardly any section of the Brāhmaṇas fails to grant and reserve the fruits of the rite for the *evaṃvid*, “the one who knows thus.” Lacking this “knowing thus,” one risks cruel disappointments that unjustly shake one’s trust:

> Originally, when one sacrificed, one would touch the altar and the oblations; those who sacrificed grew worse, and those who did not sacrifice prospered. Then distrust penetrated mankind. “Those who sacrifice grow worse, and those who do not sacrifice prosper!” they said. And, so, the oblation no longer reached the gods below; yet the gods live on what is given to them here on earth. The gods said to Bṛhaspati the Āṅgirasa: “Faithlessness has penetrated mankind; show them the proper method of sacrifice.” Bṛhaspati the Āṅgirasa went to them and said: “How is it that you are not sacrificing?” They replied: “And what desire would drive us to sacrifice? Those who sacrifice grow worse, and those who do not sacrifice prosper.” Bṛhaspati the Āṅgirasa said to them: “You have touched the altar and the oblations during the rite; that is why you have grown worse. Sacrifice without touching them, and then you will prosper.” (ŚB 1.2.5.24)

One of the essential elements of faith is the sacrificer’s firm conviction that, by a peculiar deviation of causality, he will reap the fruits of the rites performed by the priests in his service. Therefore, one must avoid any inappropriate practice that would undermine this conviction. Thus, in the half-moon sacrifice, the rule prescribes that one lower one’s gaze toward the butter of the offering. Some understood this rule as applying to the sacrificer himself.

> Yājñavalkya, however, asked: “Then why aren’t sacrificers simply their own priests? Why don’t they recite the formulas themselves when rites of far greater import must be performed? How will they ever gain faith, that faith by which all the blessings invoked by the priests in the sacrifice are exclusively for the sacrificer?” (ŚB 1.3.1.26)

To shake this faith is to ruin at its core a doctrine that poses as dogma:

> Sacrifice to the gods, blessing to the sacrificer! (ŚB 2.3.4.5)

Faith is so necessary that, without it, the sacrifice is sterile, at least for the sacrificer. It is a son of Bṛhaspati, Śamyu, who reaps, by virtue of a pact, the fruits of the lost sacrifices.

> Śamyu Bārhaspatya said to the gods: "If one offers a sacrifice without being engaged by a Brahmin, without having faith, the blessings of this sacrifice will be my lot." (TS 2.6.10.1)

Far from addressing the gods as a tribute, faith displaces the gods and takes their place.[27] The being "whose deity is faith" (*śraddhā-deva*)[28] stands alongside the *satyavādin*, "he who utters words of truth" (KB 2.8). Great saints even bear this epithet as a point of honor toward the gods. Atri, who, by the power of rites and formulas, triumphed over the asura Svarbhānu and restored light to the bewildered gods, is *śraddhā-deva*; his god is faith. Should a difficulty arise, he does not go begging the gods for uncertain aid, the sacrifice is a more direct and reliable means of action. A failure does not shake his confidence; he blames only his own ignorance and seeks rites better suited to the task. "Atri's deity was faith; though he performed the sacrifice, the four energies did not come to him—vigor, strength, Brahmanic luster, fullness of nourishment." He then perceived the suitable offerings, he presented them, used them in the sacrifice, and successively acquired the four energies that had eluded him (TS 7.1.8.2). The ideal type of the *śraddhādeva* in the Brāhmaṇas is precisely the ancestor of the human race, the exemplar of sacrificers, Manu (ŚB 1.1.4.5; TB 3.2.5.9; Kāṭh 3.30; MS 4.1.6). The bond that unites Manu to faith is so intimate and strong that the memory of it has endured throughout the literature: the Bhāgavata Purāṇa names Śraddhā as Manu's wife (BhāgP 9.1.11.4). The

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[27] Śraddhā is sometimes personified. She is the daughter of Sūrya (ŚB 12.7.3.11) and is called the goddess Śraddhā (GB 1.4.8). On his journey to the underworld, Bhṛgu sees Śraddhā and Aśraddhā together guarding a great treasure. In the ŚB version, Śraddhā appears to him as a charming woman (*kalyāṇī*); Aśraddhā as an even more charming woman (*atikalyāṇī*). The ŚB text omits any explanation of this distinction, which clearly favors Aśraddhā. The JB simply calls them "two women," but it explicitly links the *śraddhadhāna* to the *evaṃvid*. "Those who do not offer the daily oblation into the fire, and who perform sacrifices 'without knowing thus,' without faith, their sacrifices go to Aśraddhā; if they have faith, their sacrifices go to Śraddhā" (JB 1.42-44). Perhaps "*kalyāṇī*" should be rendered "prosperous," since Aśraddhā would then be more prosperous, receiving the larger number of sacrifices, according to the JB.

[28] Roth, in the *St. Petersburg Dictionary*, offers another explanation: "It is a compound formed like Bharadvāja, etc., and the sense is 'trusting in the gods, believing (gottvertrauend, gläubig)'." But the supposed analogy with compounds of the Bharadvāja type is untenable: those compounds begin with a verbal form that governs the second term, whereas the first element of *śraddhā-deva* is a noun and cannot take a direct object. The TS commentary (TS 7.1.8.2) gives the exact analysis and correct interpretation: "*śraddhā-deva* is a possessive compound meaning 'having faith as one's god': to render to faith the same homage as to a deity."

Brāhmaṇas render the same idea in another form: the female figure they associate with Manu's legend is Iḍā. In the language of ritual, the *iḍā* is the solemn offering composed of four dairy products: butter, whey, sour milk, and curds; but the offering is so simple and its effects so marvelous that it deserves to be considered the perfect symbol of faith: "That *iḍā* is *śraddhā*" (ŚB 11.2.7.20). Once the identity of the two terms is established, they may be freely substituted for one another. Manu's story enacts the doctrine of faith. The famous episode of the flood is introduced solely to glorify the virtue of the *iḍā*; alone and without any other aid, it restores to Manu progeny and herds after the cataclysm that submerged all living creatures.

> One morning, they brought Manu water for his ablutions, just as one now brings water for the washing of hands. As he was thus washing, a fish came into his hands. And the fish spoke to him: "Protect me, and I will save you." "From what will you save me?" he asked. "A deluge is about to destroy all creatures; it is from that flood that I will save you." "What must I do to keep you safe?" The fish replied, "So long as we remain little, we are exposed to many dangers, and you know that fish eat each other. First keep me in a pot; then, when I become too large, dig a pit and keep me there; then, when I grow too large, carry me to the sea; at that point I will have no more risks to run." (This fish was a *jhaṣa*, the species that grows to the greatest size.) "In the year such-and-such, a deluge will come; prepare a boat and do not lose sight of me. And when the flood covers the world, board your boat and I will save you." Manu kept the fish, then carried it to the sea; when the foretold years had passed, Manu built a boat and kept watch. When the deluge came, he went upon the boat. The fish approached; it fastened the boat's tow-rope to its horn; thus, they reached the northern mountain. It said to him, "See, I have saved you; tie your boat to a tree; but beware that you are not cut off by the water while you remain on the mountain. As the water recedes, you will descend." And so he did. The northern mountain is still called "Manu's Descent." The flood swept away all creatures, and Manu remained alone on earth. He went, worshipping, striving, longing for offspring. Then he performed a *pāka*-type sacrifice; he offered into the water butter, whey, sour milk, and curds. In one year, a woman was born; she shone all over when she emerged, leaving drops of ghee in her path. Mitra and Varuṇa met her. They asked, "To whom do you belong?" "I am the daughter of Manu." "But you belong to us." "No," she said, "I belong to the one who begot me." They wished to share her. She neither consented nor refused, and passed on. She came to Manu. Manu asked her, "To whom do you belong?" "I am your daughter." "How is it, blessed one, that you are my daughter?" "The offerings you cast into the waters—butter, whey, sour milk, curd—these brought me forth. I am the blessing. Employ me in the sacrifice. If you employ me in the sacrifice, you will multiply in offspring and in herds. Every blessing that you invoke through me will be fully and completely realized." Accordingly, he used her in the midst of the sacrifice. Through her, he went about worshipping, striving, and

> longing for offspring; by her, he begot that offspring, which is the progeny of Manu; every blessing he invoked through her was fulfilled fully and completely. (SB 1.8.1.1-10)[29]

Faith in the inherent powers of the offering not only freed Manu from appealing to the protection of the gods but also secured him advantages that the gods themselves had not obtained from sacrifice:

> Manu's Idā was competent to enlighten the sacrifice. She heard it said: "The asuras have erected the ritual fire." She went there. They first kindled the *āhavanīya* fire, then the *gārhapatya* fire, then the *anvāhārya-pacana* fire. She said: "Their fortune has gone backward, after a time of prosperity they will lose everything..." She heard it said, "The gods establish the ritual fire." She went to them. They first kindled the *anvāhārya-pacana* fire, then the *gārhapatya* fire, then the *āhavanīya* fire. She said, "Their fortune has advanced; they will prosper and ascend to the heavenly world; but they will have no sons..." And Idā said to Manu: "I will establish the fire for you in such a way that you will have offspring in progeny and in herds, both males and females, and you will be firmly established in this world, and you will conquer the heavenly world." (TB 1.1.4.4-7; MS 1.6.13; Kāṭh 8.4 [*Indische Studien* IV, 463]; cf., TS 1.7.1.3)

And Idā then taught him the details of the rites.

Concerned only with the effects of the sacrifice, Manu displays the same indifference toward gods and asuras alike; both are, in his eyes, mere effective agents to set in motion the all-powerful ritual mechanism. With equal and unshaken composure, he yields to divine or demonic officiants his utensils, his bull, even his wife and his guests, confident in the necessity of the expected outcome.

> Manu had vessels; if they were struck, all the asuras who heard the clash would cease to exist that very day. Now among the asuras at that time were two Brahmins, Tṛṣṭa and Varutri; they said to each other, "Heal us of this affliction." Each said, "Manu, you are a sacrificer; your god is faith. Give us those vessels." He gave them to them; they destroyed them with fire. A bull licked the flames, and the voice entered him. If he lowed, all the asuras who heard his lowing would cease to exist that day. Tṛṣṭa and Varutri said, "Manu, you are a sacrificer; your god is faith; we will sacrifice this bull for you." They sacrificed the bull for him...The voice passed into Manu's wife; if she spoke, all the asuras who heard her would cease to exist that day. Tṛṣṭa and Varutri said,

[29] It is important to note that the account of the flood story does not appear in any of the other Brāhmaṇas known to us.

> "Manu, you are a sacrificer; your god is faith; we will sacrifice your wife for you." They sprinkled her with water, led her around the fire, gathered wood and grass. Indra observed, "These two deceitful asuras are depriving Manu of his wife." Disguising himself as a Brahmin, Indra approached and said, "Manu, you are a sacrificer; your god is faith; I will perform the sacrifice for you." "Who are you?" "A Brahmin. Why ask for a Brahmin's father or mother? If one finds the sacred lore within him, that is his father, that is his ancestor." "What will be the offering?" "These two Brahmins." "Am I master of these two Brahmins?" "You are their master; he who offers hospitality is master of his guests." He stepped forward to destroy the second altar. They were bringing wood and grass; they said to him, "What are you doing there?" "I will sacrifice for Manu." "With what?" "With you." Then they recognized that it was Indra; they threw down the wood and grass and fled. Manu said to Indra, "Complete my sacrifice; let my sacrifice not be scattered." Indra said to him, "What you sought by sacrificing this woman, you will have; but leave her be." And he let his wife go. (MS 4.8.1; MS 4.1.6; Kāṭh 2.30.1 [*Indische Studien* III, 461]; ŚB 1.1.4.14-17; TS 6.6.6.1; TB 3.2.5.9)

One recension of this story allows the sacrifice to proceed without a word of criticism or apology. Manu truly is the hero of *śraddhā*. He possesses the madness of sacrifice just as the saints of Buddhism possess the madness of devotion. His unrivaled skill in this subtle art has earned him undisputed authority on all questions of ritual casuistry; there is no error—however grave or perilous—that he cannot remedy by the appropriate expiation.

> Everything that Manu has spoken is a remedy. (TS 2.2.10.2; MS 2.1.5; Kāṭh 11.5)

When social changes replaced ritual with law, the authority granted to Manu endured, though it changed in nature. Manu came to be regarded as the exemplar of the lawgiver, and practical legal or moral aphorisms were endorsed in his name.[30]

Faith in sacrifice is upheld not merely by a venerable name but by the force of miracles. Countless human and divine figures have experienced the beneficial effects of rites and formulas.

> Akūpārā was of the race of the Aṅgiras; just as the lizard's skin is so was hers. Indra purified it by the melody of the *triḥ-sāman* and made it the color of the sun. (TMB 9.2.14; cf., JB 1.220 in Oertel, *JAOS* XVIII, 30)

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[30] The transition is already evident in certain episodes of the Brāhmaṇas, such as the story of Nābhanediṣṭha (TS 3.1.9.4-6; MS 1.5.8).

> Devātithi wandered famished with his son; he came upon in the forest the fruits of the *urvāru*; he approached them respectfully with a ritual melody and they immediately transformed into spotted cows for him. (TMB 9.2.19)

> Śyāvāśva Ārvanānasa held a ritual session; he was carried into the desert; he heard a ritual melody; by it he brought down rain. (TMB 8.5.9)

> Sārvaseni Śauceya had a desire: "Let me have herds!" He then performed the *pañcarātra* sacrifice, and he obtained a thousand head of cattle. (TS 7.1.10.2)

But to achieve these marvelous results one needs either the gift of spontaneous vision possessed by the ancient saints, or exact knowledge of the traditional prescriptions. To employ a rite for ends not strictly its own is wasted effort:

> If one desires one object, one holds a ritual session [*sattra*]; if one desires another, one performs a sacrifice [*yajna*]; one does not obtain by a ritual session all that a sacrifice can give; one does not obtain by a sacrifice all that a ritual session can give. (TMB 22.3.2; TMB 22.10.2)

The great art is to understand the mysterious laws of causality that govern sacrificial phenomena.

> Kauṣītaki said: "Limited are the fruits of ceremonies that employ a limited number of formulas; unlimited are the fruits of ceremonies that employ an unlimited number of formulas; the mind is the unlimited; Prajāpati is the mind...therefore one gains the limited by the limited, the unlimited by the unlimited." (KB 26.3)

Thanks to certain special precautions:

> If the sacrifice has something lacking, it gives offspring to the sacrificer; if it has something in excess, it gives him cattle; if it is fragmented, it gives him wealth; if it is perfect, it gives him the sky. (ŚB 11.4.4.8)

Thus, one may profit even from lacunae or errors, dangerous though they be; for, as a general rule:

> If there is a redundant act in the sacrifice, something redundant happens to the person of the sacrificer; if the sacrifice is cut short before its end, the sacrificer becomes a pauper. (MS 1.4.11)

The ceremony does not exert its efficacy all together; all the elements that contribute to it have their own function and determined effect; the combinations must therefore vary with the object sought. The conclusion of the hymn changes depending on whether one desires offspring, herds, or brahmanic splendor (AB 17.5.1 ff.); the verses to be recited vary accordingly

(AB 8.2.17 ff.). The post to which the victim is bound is made of *khadira* wood if one wants heaven; of *bilva* wood if one wants lasting nourishment and flourishing health; of *palāśa* wood if one wants Brahmanic splendor (AB 6.1.5 ff.). The recitation comprises a hundred verses if one aims at longevity; three hundred and sixty verses if one aims at sacrifice; seven hundred and twenty verses if one aims at progeny and cattle; eight hundred verses if one sacrifices without a Brahmin's counsel or is slandered and afflicted by a blemish; a thousand verses if one aims at heaven (AB 7.7.1-8). The pronunciation of the most sacred syllable *om* is adapted to the various ends of the sacrifice (KB 11.5). The introduction to the chant is transformed according to whether one wishes to control a village, have children, obtain rain, and so forth (TMB 6.9.1-19).

In this maze of meticulous prescriptions, error is easy, and its consequences are terrible. Danger lurks everywhere for the sacrificer.

> One must not look at the fire pan when it is empty; one must say to oneself: "I do not want to look at it while it is empty." If one looked at it while it is empty, it would devour him. (ŚB 7.1.1.40)

The slope of the ground is no less threatening than the ritual implements:

> The ground of the sacrifice must rise toward the south, for that is the side of the fathers. If the ground sloped toward the south, the sacrificer would quickly go off to the world that lies in that direction. (ŚB 3.1.1.2)

Even a single word, taken in isolation, has its own power and effectiveness. For example, regarding the formula "*girā girā ca dakṣase*" (in the *yajñāyajñīya* melody), the sage Kuśāmba Svāyava Lātavya noted the unfortunate resonance of the word *girā* with the verb *gir*, "to devour." "Is it not" he said, "a monstrous being placed on the path of sacrifice to devour you?" He prudently recommended replacing the troubling disyllable, through a simple elision, with the blessed term "*irā*", which evokes satiety and well-being (TMB 8.6.8-10). Less than a word, even a misplaced accent, can unleash the most terrible calamities upon the sacrificer. Tvaṣṭar, furious at Indra for having killed his son Viśvarūpa, offered the soma without setting aside Indra's customary share. By right of strength, Indra took the cup and drank. Tvaṣṭar, consumed by anger, gathers the remaining liquor and pronounces this simple incantation: *indraśatrur vardhasva*, meaning "*indra-śatru*, grow!" But, misled by grief and hatred, he places the accent incorrectly on the compound *indra-śatru*. He thought he was saying *indra-śátru*, "enemy of Indra"; but instead, he says *índra-śatru*, "(having) Indra as an enemy."

> Because he had said: "*índraśatrur vardhasva*," for that reason Indra triumphed over Vṛtra (who was born of the incantation) and killed him. Had he said it correctly: "Enemy of

> Indra, grow!" then surely Vṛtra would have triumphed over Indra and killed him. (ŚB 1.6.3.10)

The fate—and the very life—of the most powerful of gods hinged on a single accent! This time the error benefited the gods. But another time, they learned the rules of sacrifice the hard way:

> When the gods spread out the sacrifice, they first offered the detached initial portion to Savitar; it cut off his hands. They gave him golden hands, and that is why he is called Savitar of the golden hands. They offered it to Bhaga; it destroyed his eyes; thus, he is called Bhaga the blind. They offered it to Pūṣan; it broke his teeth; thus, he is called Pūṣan the toothless, the eater of porridge. Indra is the strongest and most powerful of the gods, they said to one another, "Let us present it to him." And so they did. He calmed it with the ritual formula. (KB 6.13-14; ŚB 1.7.4.6-8; TS 2.6.8.3; GB 2.1.2)

It only took one clumsy priest to ruin great nations.

> Vasiṣṭha Satyahavya asked Devabhāga: "When you performed sacrifices for the Sṛñjayas, who sacrificed so much, did you direct the sacrifice toward '*yajña*' (in the formula: *yajñe yajñaṃ gacha yajñapatiṃ gacha*) or toward '*yajñapati*'?" He replied: "Toward '*yajñapati*.'" Then Vasiṣṭha said, "The Srñjayas deviated from ritual precision, and they lost everything. The sacrifice should have been directed toward '*yajña*' in order to preserve the sacrificer from ruin." (TS 6.6.2.2; MS 2.4.5)

Memorable examples serve as warnings to innovators and remind them to respect established traditions.

> Bhāllaveya used the *anuṣṭubh* meter for the preliminary invitation and the *triṣṭubh* meter for the offering formula. "I combine both to my advantage," he said to himself. But he fell from his chariot and broke his arm in the fall. He reflected: "It is because I acted thus that the accident happened to me; I acted contrary to the correct method in the sacrifice." (ŚB 1.7.3.19)

Some claimed they could replace, in the construction of the brick altar, the actual heads of the prescribed victims with symbolic heads; "so it was done for Aṣādhi Sauśromateya; and he died soon afterward" (ŚB 6.2.1.37). His death rightly atoned for the fault of the priests he employed; good or bad, the fruits of the sacrifice fall upon the sacrificer.

> If the priest skips a word of the invocation, it makes a hole in the sacrifice; and the sacrificer deteriorates as a result...If he switches two words in the invocation, he throws the sacrifice into confusion, and the sacrificer becomes confused as well. (AB 11.11.6)

> If the ritual post is made in a certain improper way, the sacrificer departs to the other world before his time. (ŚB 11.7.3.2)

> If the fire is installed without an invocation to the special deities, the sacrificer becomes detached from the gods and declines; if it is installed with the proper invocation, the sacrificer remains connected to the gods and his prosperity grows. (TB 1.1.4.8; TS 5.7.1.1)

There is no doubt that the faithful must have unshakable confidence to accept so many risks; it is not enough to accept the omnipotence of rites and formulas as a dogma. One must, in a sense, surrender, hand and foot, to priests who, by error or negligence, can bring about ruin or death. The choice of knowledgeable and experienced priests does not eliminate these formidable risks, but it does mitigate them; the priest's knowledge is a safeguard against unintentional errors. Yet, one danger remains, and it is the most terrible of all. Might not the priest, who holds the worshiper's fortune and life in his hands, be tempted to abuse this power? The seriousness of the danger demanded a precaution. Before beginning the sacrifice, the sacrificer and the priests bind themselves to one another by a solemn oath; on both sides, they pledge not to harm one another. This is the *tānūnaptra* ceremony, which the gods themselves are said to have performed for the first time (AB 4.7.7; TS 6.2.2.1; MS 3.7.10; ŚB 3.4.2.9). But the oath sworn does not seem to trouble priestly consciences; the Brāhmaṇas, with their customary indifference, teach a multitude of harmful procedures for the use of priests employed in sacrifices.

> "Can the reciter be concerned, either positively or negatively, for the sacrificer who employs him?" That is the question. At that moment in the rite, he can do with him as he pleases. If his desire is: "I want to deprive him of his life force," he only has to omit a verse or a word in the *vāyavya* recitation. If his desire is: "I want to deprive him of both inhalation and exhalation," he does the same in the *aindra-vāyava* recitation. (AB 11.3.2; AB 11.7.8)

The method is similar if he wishes to deprive him of sight, hearing, virility, limbs, speech, or even his entire person.

> If the reciter has this desire: "I want to deprive the sacrificer of sovereignty," he only needs to place the hymn in the middle of the invitation. If his desire is: "I want to deprive him of his people," he simply inserts the invitation in the middle of the hymn. (AB 10.1.2)

> If the priest uses different meters for the *upasad*, he causes the sacrificer to develop tubercular growths; he has the power to bring about illnesses. (AB 4.8.13)

The Brāhmaṇas frequently present, as a natural possibility, the case in which the priest harbors feelings of hatred toward the sacrificer.

> If he hates the sacrificer, the chanting priest destroys his cattle by blowing on them through this rite—just as one disperses (the ashes, etc.) by blowing on it through a bellows turned downward. (TMB 2.13.2; cf., TMB 6.5.15; TMB 6.6.2; TMB 6.6.5)
>
> If he hates the sacrificer, the reciter must think of him at the moment of pronouncing the exclamation "*vaṣat*!"; he then places upon him the thunderbolt that is the exclamation "*vaṣat*!" (AB 11.6.1; cf., AB 11.7.3)
>
> If he hates the sacrificer, the one doing the work of the sacrifice must think of him in his mind at that moment of the sacrifice. (MS 1.6.3; MS 2.5.8; MS 3.1.9)
>
> If the sacrificer desires to reach heaven, the one doing the work of the sacrifice must throw the fat into the fire by flinging it upwards into the air; for the fat represents the sacrificer, and by doing so he makes the sacrificer ascend to heaven. But if he hates him, he scatters the fat downward; in that case, the sacrificer's condition worsens. (MS 1.4.12; cf., MS 2.2.5; for an analogous text: Kāṭh [see, *Indische Studien* X, 50 ff.])

Thus, the sacrifice possesses all the characteristics of a magical operation, independent of the gods, effective by its own energy, and capable of producing evil just as well as good. It differs from proper magic only by its regular and obligatory character; it can easily be adapted to various purposes, but it exists and is performed independently of circumstances. This alone is the somewhat certain line of demarcation that can be drawn between the two domains; in practice, they are so closely intertwined that the same type of texts treat both subjects. The Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa is a veritable manual of incantations and sorcery; the Adbhuta Brāhmaṇa, which forms a section of the Ṣaḍvimśa Brāhmaṇa, has the same character. Even the sacrificial Brāhmaṇas do not disdain, occasionally, to present true recipes of sorcery unrelated to the proper rites.

> If one wants to ensure victory for an army, he must leave the camp, cut a blade of grass at both ends, and throw it toward the enemy's army while saying: "Prāsahā, who sees you?" Then, just as a daughter-in-law, overcome by shame, disappears in front of her father-in-law, so too the opposing army will vanish, dispersed, when someone who knows this cuts a blade of grass at both ends and throws it toward the enemy army while saying: "Prāsahā, who sees you?" (AB 12.11.7)[31]

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[31] In the struggle between the gods and the asuras, the asuras buried *valaga* in an attempt to secure victory. According to the commentary on the TS, *valaga* are bones, nails, hair, dust from the feet, etc., attached to an old piece of worn-out cloth and buried in the ground to bring about the death of an enemy (cf., ŚB 3.5.4.2-3). However, when these *valaga* are unearthed, their magical effectiveness is neutralized and rendered powerless (TS 6.2.11.1; similarly, MS 3.8.8 is almost identical). See also, e.g., ŚB

The model sacrifice is that of Prajāpati:

> Prajāpati gave his own person to the gods; indeed, the sacrifice belonged to them, for the sacrifice is the food of the gods. When he had given his own person to the gods, he then emitted from himself an image of his person, and this became the sacrifice. By means of the sacrifice, he redeemed his own person from the gods. Thus, when one undertakes a ceremony, just as Prajāpati gave his person to the gods, so too one gives one's own person to the gods. And when the sacrifice is spread out, by means of the sacrifice one redeems one's own person from the gods, just as Prajāpati redeemed himself. (ŚB 11.1.8.2-5)

The two phases of the operation correspond to the two movements of the sacrificer: the ascent to heaven and the return to earth. The sacrificer ascends to heaven to ensure himself a divine and immortal body; in return, he relinquishes his human and perishable body to the gods. Then, having secured and retained his place in heaven, he aspires to descend once more and redeems the body he had sacrificed. The notion of a mystical debt and redemption is familiar to the Brāhmaṇas.

> As soon as a man is born, he is born in person as a debt owed to death; when he sacrifices, he redeems his person at death. (ŚB 3.6.2.16)

> Every being, upon being born, is born as a debt owed to the gods, to the saints, to the fathers, to men. If one sacrifices, it is because it is a debt owed from birth to the gods; it is for them that one does it, when one sacrifices to them, when one offers them libations. And if one recites the sacred texts, it is because it is a debt owed from birth to the saints; it is for them that one does it, and the one who recites the sacred texts is called "the guardian of the treasure of the saints." And if one desires progeny, it is because it is a debt owed from birth to the fathers; it is for them that one does it, so that their progeny may be continuous and uninterrupted. And if one gives hospitality, it is because it is a debt owed from birth to men; it is for them that one does it, when one gives them hospitality, when one gives them food. The one who does all this has done all he has to do; he has attained everything, conquered everything. And because he is from birth a debt owed to the gods, he satisfies them by this, that he sacrifices. (ŚB 1.7.2.1-6; TS 6.3.10.5; TB 1.6.5.5; but, cf., the quite different corresponding passage MS 1.10.11)

3.9.4.17: "when Soma is struck to death, one thinks of one's enemy; in the absence of an enemy, a blade of grass is targeted in thought"; ŚB 1.4.3.11-22: methods for countering curses; MS 4.5.7: a method for making a woman fall in love (and the same at TS 6.4.4.3).

The preliminary ceremonies that equip the sacrificer with a divine body, through ritual regeneration, are formally presented as the sacrifice and redemption of the individual.

> He sacrifices his own person as a victim to all the deities, he who undergoes the *dīkṣā*. (AB 6.3.9)

> In truth, he is sacrificed as a victim by all the deities, he who has received the *dīkṣā*. And that is why it is said: "One must not eat the food of an individual in the state of *dīkṣā*"...but through the offering of the entrails (of the slaughtered victim), the sacrificer is freed from all the deities, and that is why it is said: "One may eat it after the offering of the entrails, for then the sacrificer truly exists." (AB 6.9.6; KS 10.3; ŚB 3.3.4.21)

The various categories of offerings are a kind of ransom.

> If an animal is offered as a victim, it is to thus redeem one's person, a male for a male; for the victim is a male animal, and the sacrificer is a male. (ŚB 11.7.1.3; TS 6.1.11.6)

> If one has been ill for a long time, one must offer porridge to Soma and to Rudra; when one has been ill for a long time, it is because the vital essence goes to Soma and the body to Agni. Thus, one redeems from Soma the vital essence, from Agni the body, and even if one were at the point of death, one is immediately fully alive. (TS 2.2.10.4; MS 2.1.6; cf., also TS 2.2.10.4)

But all the so-called ransoms are only subterfuges. The only authentic sacrifice would be suicide. The Brāhmaṇas ignore suicide, perhaps deliberately; such a brutal form of sacrifice would violently break with those meticulous rites the Brāhmaṇas delight in expounding. It is not forbidden, however, to believe that religious suicide—by starvation, by drowning, by crushing—recognized and practiced in India in every era, had its followers and devotees even in the Brāhmaṇa period. These ancient texts, moreover, preserve the clear and explicit memory of a practice no less savage, closely related to sacrificial suicide: human sacrifice. Man redeems himself through man. Human sacrifice is conscientiously taught and regulated in the ritual treatises. Man is the victim par excellence.

> Agni, to escape Prajāpati who wants to sacrifice him, enters into the five victims, which are: man, horse, cow, sheep, goat. Seeing them, Prajāpati says: "Just as the kindled fire shines, so too their eye shines; just as smoke comes from Agni, so too a warm breath comes from them; just as Agni consumes what is placed upon him, so too they devour; just as Agni's ashes fall, so too their excrement falls. All of them, they are Agni." (ŚB 6.2.1.2)

In the laborious construction of the brick altar, the five victims are immolated.

> The man is sacrificed first; for man is the first among animals; then the horse, for the horse comes after man; then the cow, for the cow comes after the horse; then the sheep, for the sheep comes after the cow; then the goat, for the goat comes after the sheep. Thus, they are sacrificed in the order of their dignity. (ŚB 6.2.1.18)

The memory of the last sacrifice in which the five victims had been properly slaughtered still survived in the time of the Brāhmaṇas; though compelled by the fortunes of the times to admit certain concessions, they nonetheless continued to present exactly this rite as the ideal to be pursued. There were some who made heads of gold or clay to replace the prescribed heads of the victims.

> One must not do so. One must sacrifice the five victims as much as possible. Prajāpati was the first to sacrifice them; Śyāparṇa Śāyākāyana was the last; in the interval, all were always sacrificed; but now only the two goats are sacrificed, for Prajāpati and for Vāyu. (ŚB 6.2.1.39)

The legend of Śunaḥśepa is too important a monument of this cruel practice to fail to reproduce here its essential passages, well known though the episode may be (AB 33.1-4).

> Hariścandra the Vaidhasa was a royal son of the race of Ikṣvāku. He had a hundred wives; they gave him no son. Parvata and Nārada came to dwell in his house; he questioned Nārada...Nārada said to him: "Appeal to King Varuṇa and say to him: 'Let a son be born to me, and I will sacrifice him to you'." "Very well," he said. He made his request to King Varuṇa: "Let a son be born to me, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. And a son was born to him, named Rohita. He (Varuṇa) said to him: "A son has been born to you: sacrifice him to me." He (Hariścandra) replied: "When cattle have passed ten days, then they are fit for sacrifice. Let him pass ten days, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. Now, ten days passed. He said to him: "He has passed ten days: sacrifice him to me." He said: "When cattle have teeth, then they are fit for sacrifice. Let his teeth come in, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. The child's teeth grew in. He said to him: "His teeth have grown in: sacrifice him to me." He said: "When cattle have teeth that fall out, then they are fit for sacrifice. Let his teeth fall out, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. His teeth fell out. He said to him: "His teeth have fallen out: sacrifice him to me." He said: "When cattle have teeth that grow back, then they are fit for sacrifice. Let his teeth grow back, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. His teeth grew back. He said to him: "His teeth have grown back: sacrifice him to me." He said: "When a Kṣatriya is fit to bear arms, then he is fit for sacrifice. Let him be able to bear arms, and I will sacrifice him to you." "Very well," he said. He became able to bear arms. He said to him: "Now that he can bear arms, sacrifice him to me." "Very well," he said, and he addressed his son: "My child, it is he who gave you to me; I must sacrifice you to him." "No!" he said, and taking

> his bow, he went into the forest, and for a year he wandered through the forest. Then Varuṇa seized the descendant of Ikṣvāku, and his belly swelled. Rohita heard about it and returned from the forest to the world of men. Indra appeared before him in the form of a brahmin and said to him: "The fatigue of wandering brings all kinds of benefits; this is what they say, Rohita. He who stays seated among men is vile. Indra is the friend of the wanderer. Wander forth!" He thought, "Wander forth," the brahmin said to me, and once again he wandered a year through the forest. (Five times he returned, and five times Indra appeared to him and urged him to return to the woods.) A sixth year he wandered through the forest. He met in the forest Ajīgarta Sauyavasi, the seer, who was dying of hunger. The seer had three sons: Śunaḥpucha, Śunaḥśepa, Śunolāṅgūla. He said to him: "Seer, I will give you a hundred, so that I may redeem myself through one of them." He set aside his eldest son and said: "Not that one." "Not that one," said the mother, taking the youngest. They agreed upon the middle son, Śunaḥśepa. He gave a hundred, took the young man with him, and returned to the world of men. He went to his father and said: "My father, I will ransom myself through that one." He addressed King Varuṇa: "I wish to sacrifice this one to you." "Good," said he; "a Brahmin is worth more than a Kṣatriya." Thus spoke Varuṇa. He indicated the *rājasūya* as the sacrifice to be performed. In the rite of the *abhiṣecanīya*, he took the man as the victim to be sacrificed...No one could be found to tie him to the sacrificial post. Ajīgarta Sauyavasi then said: "Give me another hundred, and I will tie him to the post." They gave him another hundred, and he tied him to the post. When the preliminary rites were done, no one could be found to cut his throat. Ajīgarta Sauyavasi then said: "Give me another hundred, and I will cut his throat." They gave him another hundred, and already he was sharpening the blade. Then Śunahśepa thought: "They are going to slaughter me as though I were not a human being. I must turn to the gods." (He then addresses a supplicating prayer to the whole series of gods.) With each verse he recited, his bonds loosened and the belly of the descendant of Ikṣvāku diminished. When the final verse was uttered, his bonds were loosened, and the descendant of Ikṣvāku was healed.

The ritual power fortunately migrated in the course of time.

> In the beginning, the gods sacrificed a man as a victim; when he was immolated, the ritual essence that he possessed left him; it entered into the horse. They sacrificed a horse; when it was immolated, the ritual essence it had left it and entered the cow. They sacrificed a cow; when it was immolated, the ritual essence it had left it and entered the sheep. They sacrificed a sheep; when it was immolated, the ritual essence it had left it and passed into the goat. (ŚB 1.2.3.6; MS 3.10.2; AB 6.8.1)

Of the rites that require one or another of these victims, it is nonetheless appropriate to recall here that the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*) is one of the greatest ceremonies of the brahmanic

ritual, and that historical India still offers examples of it. Of all the animal victims, the most frequently used is the goat.

> It is in the goat that the ritual essence remained the longest, and that is why the goat is the most usual victim. (AB 6.8)

It was merely a trick for the brahmanic scholars to establish, through the system of equivalents, the identity of the goat with all the other victims.

> If this victim is immolated, it is because in this victim lies the external characteristic of all the other victims: the goat is hornless, bearded: that is the external characteristic of man, for man is hornless and bearded; it is hornless and has a mane: that is the external characteristic of the horse, for the horse is hornless and has a mane; it has four cloven hooves: that is the external characteristic of the cow, for the cow has four cloven hooves; it has the same hooves as the sheep, and thus it has the external characteristic of the sheep; it is a goat, and so it has the external characteristic of the goat. Therefore, when it is immolated, all the victims are thereby immolated. (ŚB 6.2.2.15)

But the aversion to shedding blood, which so deeply marks the Hindu spirit, already manifests itself in this still half-savage period.

> They immolated the goat. When it was immolated, the ritual essence that it had entered into the earth; they dug to find it, and they found it: it was rice and barley. And that is why, even today, they are obtained by digging into the earth. Now, as much strength as was in all those immolated victims, that same strength belongs to the offering of the one who knows this. (ŚB 1.2.3.7; MS 3.10.2; AB 6.8)

Thus, by the Brāhmaṇas' own admission, the passage of time modifies and transforms the rites of sacrifice.[32] In a notable paradox, India, a civilization without conventional history, knows the history of its ritual. The name of Śyaparṇa Śāyakāyana, who was the last to construct the altar according to the original rules, has been preserved through the ages (ŚB 6.2.1.39). The transmission of the *dākṣāyaṇa* sacrifice is known in detail:

> Prajāpati was the first to offer this sacrifice, desiring offspring: "I want," he said to himself, "to multiply through progeny, through herds, to attain greatness, to shine, to feast." And his name was Dakṣa; and since he was the first to offer this sacrifice, it is

[32] The abandonment of an ancient rite is enough to explain (MS 1.6.8) the decline of priestly supremacy: "He must renew this offering and then no one will have power over him; in the time when the Brahmins used to offer it, no one commanded them; but nowadays they no longer offer it, and that is why anyone can command them."

> called the *dākṣāyaṇa* sacrifice...After him, Pratidarśa Śvaikna offered this sacrifice; to those who were his rivals, he was the decisive authority...Suplan Sārñjaya came to him to become his novice...he offered this sacrifice...After him, Devabhāga Śrautarṣa offered this sacrifice; he was the domestic priest for both the Kurus and the Srñjayas...After him, Dakṣa Pārvati offered this sacrifice; from him descend today's Dākṣāyaṇas, who have, so to speak, acquired royal dignity. (ŚB 2.4.4.1-6; AB 35.8.7)

Belief in the effectiveness of the sacrifice as a whole is undoubtedly a dogma; but the details leave room for discussion. Needless to say, the mystical interpretation of the rites varies among individuals: Janaka and Yājñavalkya engage in a long debate over the meaning of the daily fire offering (ŚB 11.6.2.1 ff; see, OST I, 426); elsewhere, six brahmins, disagreeing over the essence of Vaiśvānara—whether it is earth, water, space, etc.—bring the dispute before Aśvapati Kaikeya and ask for a judgment (ŚB 10.6.1.1; see also, the story of Uddālaka Āruṇi, ŚB 11.4.1.1 ff.; GB 1.3.6-10). But the rite itself is sometimes questioned. A formal prescription requires a libation to be offered to two asuras, Śaṇḍa and Marka.

> Yājñavalkya said about this: "Shouldn't we make this libation to the gods, for it is a sign of victory?" But this was only a theoretical reflection; he did not put it into practice. (ŚB 4.2.1.7)[33]

The same cautious reserve accompanies a similar discussion elsewhere:

> It is said that the five libations may be reduced to a single one...but this is merely a theoretical reflection; in practice, all five [oblations] are offered. (ŚB 3.1.4.22)

But it also often happens that the brahmanic schools disagree on the very form of the rite. Frequently, a very conscientious description of a ritual procedure ends with an explicit condemnation:

> It must not be done this way. (ŚB 3.2.3.22)

> This should not be taken into account. (ŚB 3.8.2.25; AB 1.4)

The polemics of the priestly doctors resound violently throughout the Brāhmaṇas. A priest from the Caraka school criticized Yājñavalkya's method:

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[33] This delicate issue of offering to the rakṣas is also discussed at AB 6.7.5. Some believed that the rakṣas had no place in the sacrifice; others responded that it was wrong, and above all dangerous, to deprive them of their due. The conclusion of the AB is that the invocation must be made, but in a low voice.

> He has failed the breath; breath will fail him. And Yājñavalkya, looking at his arms, said: "These two arms are turning grey; what has become of the word of the brahmin? (ŚB 3.8.2.24-25; cf., ŚB 1.3.1.26)

Prāgahi, Paiṅgya, Āruṇi, and Śvetaketu taught divergent methods for correcting ritual errors when a sacrifice exceeded its bounds. Daivodāsi Prātardana raised the question at the ritual session of the Naimiṣīyas, but received no answer. Alīkayu Vācaspati, who was their brahmin, replied: "I do not know; I will question the teacher of the ancients, the *sthavira* Jātukarṇya." But Jātukarṇya's method was in turn criticized by Kauṣītaki (KB 26.4-5) The editor of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa rejects the theories of Tāṇḍya and Āktākṣya concerning the arrangement of the altar bricks (ŚB 6.1.2.24-25). Jīvala Cailaki condemned as insufficient the recitation and interpretation recommended by Takṣan for a formula of the daily oblation to fire. Gauśla similarly criticized the form of recitation proposed by Bulila Āśvatarāśvi, and Bulila, convinced of his error, submitted (AB 30.4.7; reproduced at GB 2.6.9).

The variety of usages and their competing claims are not due to uncertainty or confusion stemming from an overly ancient tradition; they are inherent in the very nature of the revelation. The brahmins did not receive all of the revelation at once from a single god or a single prophet. The total number of formulas and procedures that make up the sacrifice is indefinite; experience or a fortunate chance gradually revealed a certain number of them to the gods.

> The gods saw the sacrifices one by one. (MS 1.11.5; TB 1.3.2.1)

It is enough to recall the countless episodes of the struggle between the gods and the asuras, and the inevitable conclusion that rings like a refrain: "Then the gods saw the rite, and they triumphed, and the asuras were defeated." The discovery of the new rite is the *deus ex machina* that resolves even the most difficult situations. The Brāhmaṇas do not concern themselves with justifying the gods' victories by right; their triumph is a fact, and the reasons matter little. Divine nature, in any case, does not show any particular affinity with the sacrifice; many stories recount the flight of the sacrifice, which tries to escape the gods. To hide, it sometimes takes the form of Viṣṇu (TB 6.2.4.2; cf., MS 3.8.3) and sometimes that of Suparṇa (TMB 14.3.10), sometimes a horse (ŚB 3.4.1.17; TMB 6.7.18), sometimes a black antelope (ŚB 1.1.4.1) The gods, desperate, could only convince it to return through the power of rituals and prayers (AB 11.9.1; AB 1.2.1; AB 2.2.15; ŚB 1.5.2.6). Before mastering the exact practice of the revealed rite, the gods had to undergo an arduous learning process, which sometimes came at a heavy price: for lack of proper knowledge, Bhaga lost his eyes, Pūṣan his teeth, and Savitar his hands. Left to their own devices, the gods were not always capable of "seeing" the necessary rite; they occasionally

had to wait for or seek the help of those saintly beings who are neither gods nor humans, but are found among all categories of beings, beings known as the ṛṣis.

> The gods were holding a ritual session at Sarvacaru; they were unable to drive evil away from themselves. Arbuda Kādraveya, who was a ṛṣi among the serpents and who composed liturgical formulas, said to them: "There is an offering you have not made; I will perform it for you, and you will drive the evil away." "Very well," they said. Every day at noon, he would leave his dwelling, come to them, and perform the pressing of the soma stones...Now the soma intoxicated them. They said: "The serpent is watching our soma, let us blindfold him." "Very well," they said, and they blindfolded him...But the soma still intoxicated them. They said: "He sings the pressing stones with a formula that is his own; let us mix his formula with other verses." "Very well," they said, and the soma no longer intoxicated them, and they drove the sin away. (AB 26.1.1)

The ṛṣis are the true heroes of revelation; the function of "seeing" is so deeply inherent in their nature that Indian etymologists—more concerned with meaning than with phonetics—attempted to link their name to the root *dṛś* ("to see"). The Brāhmaṇas offer another explanation: they are called ṛṣis because they were the first to toil and become heated at the origin of things (ŚB 6.1.1.1). The ṛṣis hold the same rank as the gods, and they owe it to the same practices:

> It is through sacrifice that the gods won all their successes, and so did the ṛṣis. (ŚB 2.4.3.3; cf., ŚB 1.6.2.3; AB 29.3.11; AB 29.4.2)

But although they used the same means, they did not do so at the same time. The ṛṣis generally came after the gods, at the same time as humans; without this fortunate encounter, mankind would never have come to know the rites hidden from them by the jealous selfishness of the gods. The insight of the ṛṣis allowed them to rediscover what the gods had once discovered:

> The gods, by sacrificing, toiling, heating themselves, and making oblations, conquered the heavenly world. When they had offered the entrails, the celestial world opened to them; after the offering of the entrails, without concerning themselves with other ritual acts, they rose to the celestial world. And the ṛṣis and men then came to the place where the gods had performed their sacrifice: "Let us go," they said to themselves, "to search for something of the sacrifice so that we may gain knowledge." They wandered around and found the victim emptied of entrails; they understood that the entrails were equal in value to the entire victim. (AB 7.3.6)

When the gods had offered the sacrifice, they sought to erase its traces in order to close the path to heaven.

> But the ṛṣis knew this, and they resolved to go in search. They wandered, worshipping, laboring. And then either the gods gave them the inspiration, or they decided spontaneously: "Come," they said, "let us go; we shall surely reach the place from which the gods set out to enjoy heaven" ...And the sacrifice appeared to them, they brought it forth, they spread it out. (ŚB 1.6.2.1-4; cf., ŚB 1.9.1.25; TS 6.3.4.7; AB 6.1.1)

> Prajāpati brought forth the sacrifice; once brought forth, the gods used it to sacrifice. Through this sacrifice, they obtained all their desires. But they hid one half of it: the *praiṣa*(s) and the *nigada*(s). The ṛṣis then offered a second sacrifice; they realized: "Truly, we are sacrificing with an incomplete sacrifice and are not obtaining all our desires." They labored; they saw the *praiṣa* and the *nigada*; they offered the sacrifice with the *praiṣa* and the *nigada*, and they attained all their desires. (KB 28.1)

The gods, however, do not treat the ṛṣis as rivals; they willingly offer them help.

> The ṛṣi Viśvamanas was studying the sacred texts when a rakṣas seized him. Indra observed: "A rakṣas has seized the ṛṣi." He said to the ṛṣi, "Ṛṣi, who is it then?" The rakṣas said to the ṛṣi, "Say that it is Sthāṇu." "It is Sthāṇu," he said. "Well then, strike him with this," and he gave him a reed stalk in place of a thunderbolt. The ṛṣi used it to split open the head of the rakṣas. (TMB 15.5.20)

The benevolence of the gods is accompanied by deference.

> The gods were dividing the sacred knowledge; Nodhas Kakṣīvata arrived. They said: "A ṛṣi has come to us; let us give him the sacred knowledge," and they gave him a ritual melody. (TMB 7.10.10)

The gods have acknowledged and proclaimed the eminent status of the ṛṣis.

> Śiśu Āṅgirasa was, among the authors of sacred formulas, one of the foremost. He greeted the fathers with the words, "My sons!" The fathers said: "You are violating propriety by greeting us, your fathers, as 'sons.'" He replied: "Truly, I am the father, I who am an author of sacred formulas." They brought the matter before the gods. The gods said: "Truly, he is the father, since he is an author of sacred formulas." Thus, he prevailed. (TMB 13.3.24)

Between the ṛṣis and the gods, shared tastes, family traditions, and mutual services create personal friendships.

> The Vaikhānasas were the ṛṣis beloved of Indra; Rahasyu Devamalimluṅ caused them to die at Munimaraṇa. The gods said to him: "Where are your munis?" Indra searched for them; he did not find them. He sifted through all the worlds and found them at Munimaraṇa; he brought them back to life. (TMB 14.4.7)

Here, Indra is the benefactor; elsewhere, he is the one indebted.

> Upagu Sauśravasa was the priest of Kutsa Aurava. Kutsa made this vow: "Let no one offers a sacrifice to Indra!" Indra came to Suśravas and said: "Offer a sacrifice for me, I am very hungry." He performed a sacrifice for him. Indra went away, holding the sacrificial cake in his hand, to find Kutsa, and said to him: "A sacrifice has been made for me. What good was your vow?" "Who performed a sacrifice for you?" "Suśravas." Then Kutsa Aurava, with *udumbara* wood, cut off the head of Upagu Sauśravasa while he was chanting the ritual hymn. Suśravas said to Indra: "This happened to me because of you." Indra used a melody to bring him back to life. (TMB 14.6.8)

Indra's miracle merely repays the service he was rendered. In the relentless struggle between the gods and the asuras, the intervention of the ṛṣis has often decided the outcome. Atri returned the light stolen by Svarbhānu to the gods.

> The gods had settled in the *agniṣṭoma*, the asuras in the *uktha*; they were evenly matched, the battle undecided. Among the ṛṣis, Bharadvāja saw that the asuras had settled in the *uktha*. "And no one sees them," he thought. He called Agni. Agni stood up and said: "What does this tall, thin, white-haired man want to tell me?" Bharadvāja was tall, thin, and had white hair. He said: "Look, the asuras are in the *uktha*, and none of you sees them." Agni transformed into a horse and charged at them. (AB 15.5.1-7)

The gods feel no shame in seeking such invaluable aid.

> The gods and the asuras were at war; between the two camps, Gotama was striving. Indra came to him and said: "Let your lordship serve as our spy here!" "No, I do not wish to." "Then let me take your form to move about." "As you wish." (ṢaḍvB 1.1.24)

Just as they call upon the ṛṣis, when needed, for the sacrifice that sustains them, the gods also respectfully ask for the meter or hymn that pleases them.

> Vasiṣṭha discovered the meter *virāj*. Indra desired it. He said: "Ṛṣi, you know the *virāj*, tell it to me." Vasiṣṭha replied: "What do I gain from this?" "I will tell you the expiation for the faults of the entire sacrifice..." The ṛṣi told Indra the *virāj*: "Here is the *virāj*!" And Indra told the ṛṣi the expiation of ritual faults. (ŚB 12.6.1.38-41)

Though the ṛṣis are friends of the gods, they are not their proteges; the two powers treat one another as equals, for they possess the same means.

> The ṛṣis did not see Indra face-to-face. Vasiṣṭha had a desire: "How can I see Indra face-to-face?" He discovered this invocation, and then he saw Indra face-to-face. Indra said to him: "I will tell you the ritual science, so that the generations of the Bharata will have you as their priest; but do not reveal me to the other ṛṣis." He then told him the

> rite, and the generations of the Bharata had Vasiṣṭha as their priest. (TMB 15.5.24; TS 3.5.2; Kāṭh 37.17, with inserted terms [*Indische Studien* III, 478]; GB 2.2.13)

Unable to resist the superior force that compels him to appear, Indra has no other recourse than to buy the seer's discretion.

Independent of the gods, the ṛṣis discover rites or formulas through direct intuition; they "see" them, just as the gods do.

> Vasiṣṭha, who had lost all his sons, had a desire: "I would like to obtain offspring! I would like to dominate over the Saudāsas!" He then saw the rite *ekasmān-napañcāśa*; he used it to offer the sacrifice; he obtained offspring and dominated the Saudāsas. (TS 7.4.7.1; cf., TMB 4.7.3; TMB 8.2.4)

> Aṣṭādamṣṭra Vairūpa was growing old without sons, without progeny...in his old age, he saw these two ritual melodies. He feared they would remain unused. He then said: "Let him prosper who will sing my melodies in the sacrifice!" (TMB 8.9.21)

> Yuktāśva Āṅgirasa had exchanged two newborn children; the formula abandoned him. He underwent intense mortifications, he saw the melody that bears his name, and the formula returned to him. (TMB 11.8.8)

> Sindhukṣit was a ṛṣi of royal lineage; he remained dethroned for a long time; he saw the melody that bears his name; he seized it, and was then firmly established. (TMB 12.12.6; with the same story about Dīrghaśravas Rājanyarṣi, TMB 15.3.25)

In very rare cases, the rite or formula offers itself spontaneously and, as it were, seeks out the eyes of the ṛṣi.

> The melody (*vāravantīya*) revealed itself to Keśin Dālbhya; it said to him: 'Those who sing me are not singers; let them not use me to sing!" "How then should one sing you, O venerable one?" "I must be sung in a murmur; it is by murmuring, so to speak, that I am sung." (TMB 13.10.8)

But brutal and unreflective vision is not enough; intelligence also plays a role in the discovery of sacrificial elements.

> Kaṇva saw the melody without the prelude; he lacked a stable foundation. He heard a cat sneezing, making the sound "*aṣ*!" He realized that was the prelude, and then he had a stable foundation. (TMB 8.2.2)

Even if the clarity and immediacy of the vision leave no doubt in the ṛṣi's mind about the value of his discovery, it still must undergo public validation before being universally accepted. The

test is a miracle, or at the very least, success. The incomparable power of sacrifice must overcome even the most desperate difficulties.

> The Praiyamedhas all knew the sacred science in the same way, but they did not agree on the daily offering to the fire. One made three offerings, another two, another only one. They asked the one who made three offerings: "To whom did you make the offering?" He answered: "In three parts, to Agni, Prajāpati, and Soma." They then asked the one who made two offerings: "To whom did you offer?" He replied: "In two parts: at night, to Agni and Prajāpati; in the morning, to Sūrya and Prajāpati." They then asked the one who made a single offering: "To whom do you offer?" He replied: "At once, to Prajāpati." Among them, the one who made the offering twice was successful; the other two then followed his example. (MS 1.8.7; Kāṭh 6.6.8 [*Indische Studien* III, 474]; GB 1.3.15)

Success is the distinguishing mark of brahmanic knowledge, to such an extent that in cases of dispute, it relieves the brahmin of any further trial.

> The ṛṣis were holding a ritual session on the Sarasvatī. They excluded Kavaṣa Ailūṣa from the soma: "He is the son of a slave woman, a scoundrel, not a brahmin. How did he receive the *dīkṣā* among us?" They carried him outside, to a place without water: "May thirst kill him there; let him not drink the water of the Sarasvatī." Taken away to a place without water, tormented by thirst, he saw the *āponaptrīya*...Through that, he gained access to the waters; the waters rose up to follow him; the Sarasvatī rushed in to surround him on all sides. That is why this place is still called Parisāraka, because the Sarasvatī surrounded (*parisar*) the ṛṣi there from all sides. The ṛṣis said: "The gods have acknowledged him; let us call him back to us." "Very well," they said. They called him back; having done so, they performed the *āponaptrīya*. (AB 8.1.1-3; cf., KB 12.3; TMB 8.5.9)

> Vatsa and Medhātithi were both from the family of Kaṇva. Medhātithi shouted at Vatsa: "You are not a brahmin, you are the son of a śūdra!" Vatsa replied: "Let us both enter the fire with ritual exactness, and see who among us has the greater brahmanic knowledge." Vatsa entered with his formula, and Medhātithi with his own. The fire did not even singe a hair of Vatsa. (TMB 14.6.6)

> Nṛmedha and Paruchepa were discussing brahmanic knowledge: "Let us make fire appear from this wet wood, and see who among us has the greater knowledge." Nṛmedha recited a formula and produced smoke; Parucchepa recited a formula and produced fire. "Ṛṣi," he said, "since we both have the same knowledge, how is it that you produced fire and I did not?" He replied: "It is because I know the coloration of the kindling formulas. The name of the clarified butter mentioned in them; that is their coloration." (TS 2.5.8.3)

In the end, the superiority of man comes down to the superiority of the recipe.

IV — THE SACRIFICE AND MORALITY: THE GOD VARUṆA

It is not my intention to outline the characteristics of the many figures that populate the pantheon of the Brāhmaṇas. I have contented myself with indicating the common traits that define the divine family in its relation to sacrifice, and this sketch alone has already served to highlight the striking moral indifference of the gods, or rather, of brahmanic theology. It is only fair to counterbalance such a negative impression by studying a deity generally regarded as embodying the noblest concepts of Vedic morality: Varuṇa. Varuṇa is frequently associated with Mitra; their two names, joined together, resound in invocations like a kind of corporate identity. The brahmanic scholars could not resist the temptation to interpret this pair through other similarly familiar pairs. Mitra and Varuṇa are, depending on context, intelligence and will, decision and action (ŚB 4.1.4.1), the waning moon and the waxing moon (ŚB 2.4.4.18). The disparity of these interpretations reveals their fanciful nature. Varuṇa is described as the *kṣatra*, the essence of the royal caste (ŚB 2.5.2.34; ŚB 4.1.4.1); from this perspective, he merges with Indra, the warrior hero of the sky. Akin to Indra, he bears the title of king:

> Varuṇa, truly, is the king of the gods. (MS 1.6.11; MS 2.2.1)

And, similar to Indra, he received the consecrating anointment.

> Now, when Varuṇa was consecrated king, his strength, his virility deserted him. (ŚB 5.4.3.2)

The *rajasūya* rite is none other than the rite of consecration once used by Varuṇa.

> Varuṇa made use of it, and that is why it is still used. (ŚB 2.2.3.1).

Naturally, it is to the rites that he owes his royal dignity.

> Varuṇa, desiring kingship, established the sacred fire; he attained kingship; that is why both the ignorant and the learned say, when speaking of him: “Varuṇa the King.” (ŚB 2.2.3.1)

Unlike so many other abstract, vague, and intangible gods, Varuṇa has a very clear figure:

> White, bald, soaking wet, with yellow eyes...this is Varuṇa’s appearance. (ŚB 13.3.5.5; TB 3.9.15.3)

But Varuṇa's chief attribute is the rope or noose;[34] traditional etymology—rightly or wrongly—explains the god's name by his tool: "He is Varuṇa, because he binds the wicked in his noose."[35] Regardless of the accuracy of this interpretation, the concrete fact remains, "the noose belongs to Varuṇa" (ŚB 1.3.1.14). And that is why, during the course of sacrifice, when the wife of the sacrificer is bound with a cord,

> ...plants are placed between the cord and the body; in this way, the cord that belongs to Varuṇa does not harm the woman...But one must be careful not to tie a knot; the knot belongs to Varuṇa; Varuṇa would take the woman if a knot were made.[36] (ŚB 1.3.1.14-16)

With his cords and his noose, Varuṇa inspires a legitimate fear, for "Varuṇa is the author of suffering" (ŚB 5.5.4.31). Whoever deviates from the normal state is possessed by Varuṇa.

> He who is seized by illness is, in truth, taken by Varuṇa with his Varuṇian noose. (TS 2.3.13.2; ŚB 12.7.2.17)

> If one suffers from dyspepsia, it is because one is taken by Varuṇa...If one longs for wealth, it is because one is taken by Varuṇa...If one desires a village, it is because one is taken by Varuṇa. (MS 2.3.1)

His lurking malice naturally seeks satisfaction in the sacrifice:

> When one sacrifices, all that is properly sacrificed is taken by Mitra; but all that is poorly sacrificed is taken by Varuṇa. (ŚB 4.5.1.6; TMB 15.2.4; cf., TB 1.6.5.5)

Thus, "...if the oblation is made in the *āhavanīya* fire, the sacrificer is seized by the noose of Varuṇa"; in any case, Varuṇa does not miss his victim:

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[34] [Tr. Note: Lévi uses "noeud," ("knot") for the Sanskrit *pāśa*, which is typically translated as "noose" in English translations of Vedic texts.]

[35] Sayaṇa's commentary on the Ṛgveda I, 89, 3: *vṛṇoti pāpakṛtaḥ svakīyaiḥ pāśair avṛṇoti* ("He binds the evil-doers with his own noose"). Cf. Bergaigne, La Religion Védique, III, 114: "This function of Varuṇa is perhaps, indeed, the one upon which the Vedic poets most often insist, and the attribute has remained attached to the visual representation of Varuṇa in Brāhmaṇic mythology, even after he had descended from the rank of avenging Providence to that of a mere god of the waters. Varuṇa is, in fact, always depicted with a rope in his hand." What remains to be determined is whether this truly reflects a chronological evolution of the figure.

[36] The prohibition likely refers to TB. 3.3.3.4 which prescribes tying a knot as a symbol of all blessings.

> If the oblation is made correctly in the *dakṣiṇa* fire, the rival of the sacrificer is seized by the noose of Varuṇa. (TB 1.6.5.4)

Both the sacrificer and the deity are satisfied by this clever arrangement. Since Varuṇa is the enemy of ritual faults, one could say that he is the protector of the well-performed sacrifice. Viṣṇu, on the other hand, who embodies the sacrifice, is then, from this point of view, the protector of the poorly performed sacrifice, since he is relied upon to correct errors (AB 32.4.5-6). Under these two seemingly contradictory aspects, the function of the god remains the same.

> Soma, when it is sold, then becomes varuṇian. (ŚB 3.3.4.25)

The powerful liquid that enables ritual enchantment, as soon as it becomes an article of commerce, loses its beneficent energy and becomes only a dangerous water. Since Varuṇa thus alters the action of the soma, it is to him that one must turn to restore soma's power; the god alone can neutralize his own influence:

> The Asurī Dīrghajihvī had licked the soma that the gods had pressed in the morning; the soma intoxicated them; the gods sought a remedy; they said to Mitra and Varuṇa: "Fix it for us." (AB 8.4.10)

As always, the pair consents to intervene only in exchange for the promise of a reward.

With his snares and knots ever ready to seize the wicked, Varuṇa was naturally appointed to preside over punishments in the afterlife. It is he who, to correct the arrogance of his son Bhṛgu, unrolls before his eyes the spectacle of infernal torments (as discussed above). Among all the gods, he possesses the exclusive privilege (shared with his inseparable companion Mitra) of having a priest specifically dedicated to him: the *maitrāvaruṇa*. He also has his own sacrificial victim, which is the goat, and his own offering: barley grains.

> Varuṇa harshly rubbed the eye of King Soma, and it became swollen; from this the horse was born...tears flowed from it; from these tears, barley was born; and that is why it is said: "Barley belongs to Varuṇa." (ŚB 4.2.1.11; cf., ŚB 2.5.2.1; MS 1.10.12; as described above, TS 6.4.10.5 and MS 4.6.3, the grain is born from Prajāpati's swollen eye.)

Under such patronage, barley could not fail to be ominous.

> Once the creatures who had been emitted ate the barley grains of Varuṇa, for in the beginning, barley belonged to Varuṇa...Varuṇa seized them; once seized by Varuṇa, they swelled; to breathe or to inhale, they remained lying down or sitting. Prajāpati used the offering called "the food of Varuṇa" to heal them; and thus, the creatures that had been born to him, as well as those that had not yet been born, he delivered from

> the noose of Varuṇa, and he brought forth creatures without illness, without sin. (ŚB 2.5.2.1-3; GB 2.1.21; MS 1.10.10)

Another version of the same story transforms Varuṇa into a judge; if he punishes creatures, it is because they have failed in their duty to their father, Prajāpati. Indeed, "when a fault is committed, Varuṇa takes hold of you" (TS 1.7.2.6). This concerns especially faults against precision or correctness. When the gods bind themselves by the oath of the *tānūnaptra* to offer mutual assistance, it is in Varuṇa's house that they deposit their pledges (discussed above). The rite called "the food of Varuṇa" also contains the oldest known example of confession in India.

> At that moment, the priest turns toward the wife of the sacrificer and, before leading her forth, says to her: "With whom do you consort?" For a woman commits an act under Varuṇa's jurisdiction if, belonging to one man, she runs off with another. To prevent her from making the oblation with a guilty conscience, he puts this question to her. A sin that is spoken aloud becomes lesser, for it then becomes correctness. That is why he questions her. And if she does not confess, it brings misfortune upon her family.[37] (ŚB 2.5.2.20; TB 1.6.5.2)

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[37] The brutality of the question thus posed to the wife during the rite indicates less a real disorder in female morals than the priests' disregard toward women. No doubt, the ritual gives the body of a well-formed woman, "broad in the hips, narrow in the middle, and large in the front" (ŚB 1.2.5.5; ŚB 1.2.5.16), as a model for the *vedi*. No doubt, it proclaims that "the woman is half of man; that is why he has no offspring until he takes a wife; for only then is he whole" (ŚB 5.2.1.10). But if she is an indispensable half, she is all the more dangerous for it: "The woman is death" (MS 1.10.16). "There are three things that are of death: dice, women, and sleep" (MS 3.6.3). "Truth and reality are the sacrifice; untruth is the woman" (MS 1.10.11). If "her voice sounds softer at night" (Kāṭh 30.1), it is because "She seeks to learn from her husband and does so at night. The gods, wanting to find out about Indra, said: 'His beloved wife, his favorite, is Prāsahā; let's try to learn through her.' 'Fine,' they said. They tried to find out through her. She said to them: 'Tomorrow morning I will tell you'" (AB 12.11.1). Three gentle invitations can win over even the most reserved woman (ŚB 3.2.1.18-23). Their frivolous tastes are captivated by those who sing and dance (ŚB 3.2.4.3-6; TS 6.1.6.5; MS 3.7.3). As the man's associate, she has a share in the sacrifice; but "she is the posterior half of the sacrifice" (ŚB 1.3.1.12), and to include her in the rite, prior purification is necessary. "The part of the wife below the navel is impure... so it is hidden with a girdle" (ŚB 1.3.1.13). She can under no circumstances surpass the male. "If many women are walking together and there is a male among them, even a small boy, it is he who walks first, and they follow him" (ŚB 1.3.1.9). "With the ghee used as a thunderbolt, the gods struck the wives; they unmanned them. Thus, struck and unmanned, they became incapable of being their own masters or of possessing a share of inheritance. So, he strikes the wives with this ghee as a thunderbolt; thus, he unmans them. Struck and manned, they are incapable of being their own masters or of having a share in inheritance"

The redemption of sin through confession is presented here in a peculiar light; but the explanation must align with the overall system. If Varuṇa is always ready to seize the woman who deceives her husband, it is because she falsifies the rite; while she belongs to one man through the rite, in reality she belongs to another. The confession reestablishes the facts; it does not morally repair the fault, but rather causes it to disappear, since the act and the word are henceforth in agreement.

> She commits an inaccuracy, the woman who, though belonging to her husband through purchase, then goes off with others; therefore, by relinquishing the inaccuracy, she returns to reality and exactitude. (MS 1.10.11)

Varuṇa is, in classical mythology, the god of the waters. The Brāhmaṇas already attribute this function to him:

> Varuṇa is in the waters. (TB 1.6.5.6)

> The plants belong to Mitra, the waters to Varuṇa. (TS 2.1.9.2)

> In truth, they clearly belong to Varuṇa, the waters. (MS 2.5.6)

Whatever enters the waters is absorbed by him.

> When the sun enters the water, it becomes Varuṇa. (KB 18.9)

Similarly, we see the new moon pass into the waters and plants and be transformed there into Soma (ŚB 1.6.4.5). It is as the divinity of the waters that Varuṇa is opposed to Soma; the soma liquid, deprived of its distinguishing properties, becomes nothing more than the liquid of Varuṇa.

> Varuṇa is the ocean. (MS 4.7.8)

The relationship that unites Varuṇa with the waters can be expressed as a marital bond:

> The waters were the wives of Varuṇa; Agni desired to possess them, and he united with them. (TS 5.5.4.1[38])

And it is thus that ritual alchemy explains the origin of gold. The details of the rite clearly express the connection between the waters and Varuṇa's inherent energy.

(ŚB 4.4.2.13; cf., TS 6.5.8.2: "it is said that they are worth less than even an evil man.") Thus, "a newborn girl is cast away, but not a boy" (MS 4.6.4).

[38] TB 1.1.3.8 reproduces this passage and concludes: "His semen fell down; that became gold."

> If, in flowing waters, there are some that remain stagnant, it is because Varuṇa has taken them; the bath is "varuṇian"; it serves to free one from Varuṇa...When one immerses him in water, the sacrificer recites: "Hail to Varuṇa! The bond of Varuṇa is broken!" And thus, he is freed from every bond of Varuṇa, from all that is varuṇian (ŚB 4.4.5.10-11)

God of the waters and god of exactitude, Varuṇa seems to combine the traits of a naturalistic deity and a moral one. In fact, he is neither. The two apparent aspects of the god are only the illusory doubling of a single identity. Waters and exactitude are notions that coincide in the doctrine of the Brāhmaṇas. The waters are more ancient than all the rest of creation:

> In the beginning, the universe was only water, nothing but liquid. (ŚB 11.1.6.1; TS 5.6.4; ŚB 7.4.1.6)

Since they preceded everything, they serve as a support for everything.

> It is on the waters that the worlds rest. (ŚB 6.7.1.17)

In this role, they closely approach reality.

> Hiraṇyadan Baida said: "The sky rests upon the atmosphere, the atmosphere upon the earth, the earth upon the waters, the waters upon reality, reality upon sacred knowledge." (AB 11.6.4)

As the primordial foundation of creation which they support (*dhar*), the waters materially realize the law (*dharma*), which, by virtue of its very name, is the universal foundation.

> The waters are the law; and that is why, when the waters come into this world, everything proceeds according to law. But when the rains fail, then the strong despoil the weak, because the waters are the law. (ŚB 11.1.6.24)

They border so closely on reality that the distinction fades away:

> Reality is exactly the same as the waters; for the waters are reality; and that is why, wherever the waters go, it is said that reality manifests itself. (ŚB 7.4.1.6; MS 4.1.4)

Since the sacrifice is the one and supreme reality, the waters can represent either its substance or its elements:

> The waters are immortality. (MS 4.1.9; GB 2.1.3)
>
> The waters are all the deities. (TS 2.6.8.3)
>
> The waters are faith in the sacrifice. (MS 1.4.10; MS 4.1.10; TS 1.6.8.1)
>
> The waters are the sacrifice. (MS 3.6.2; MS 3.6.9; MS 4.1.4)

The purity of the sacrifice resides in them:

> At the beginning of a ritual practice, one rinses with water. This is the reason: Man does not possess ritual purity in that he speaks inaccurate words; and that is why he becomes corrupted. The waters possess ritual purity. He says to himself: "I want to have ritual purity to begin the practice." The waters are the means of ritual purification. He says: "I want to be ritually purified by a means of purification to begin the practice." And, that is why one rinses with water. (ŚB 1.1.1.1; TS 6.1.1.3; TS 6.1.1.7; ŚB 3.1.2.10)[39]

The prescription of the bath is justified by the same reasoning and in the same terms. The energy of the waters is so great that the bath alone is enough to confer the *dīkṣā*, to bring about the supernatural transformation of the sacrificer (TS 6.1.1.2; MS 3.6.2):

> For indeed, the gods, before ascending to the heavens, passed the *dīkṣā* into the waters. (MS 3.6.2; TS 6.1.1.2; TB 1.8.2.1)

Their purity is thus immune to all defilement. Long ago, they made a pact with the gods:

> The waters said: "Whatever impurity men may cast into us, we shall not be contaminated by it." (TMB 6.5.10)

They are the very sap of the sacrifice:

> Now, when the head of the sacrifice was cut off, the sap that flowed from it ran and plunged into the waters; and it is still with that same sap that the waters flow. (ŚB 3.9.2.1; TMB 7.8.1).

The *darbha* grass, which is the purest grass *par excellence*, owes this privilege to the latent presence of the waters:

> Indra slew Vṛtra above the waters; what was in them of the sacrificial, of the ritually pure, came forth; from it these very grasses were born. The *darbha* is the very strength of the waters; it is nothing but dry water. (MS 3.6.3; TS 6.1.1.7; TB 3.2.5.1; ŚB 7.2.3.2; ŚB 1.1.3.5)

The essence of the sacrifice that resides within them grants them a thunderous power:

> The waters are lightning; and that is why, where they pass, they hollow out the earth; where they remain, they consume. (ŚB 1.1.1.17; ŚB 3.1.2.6)

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[39] ŚB 3.1.2.10, however, instead of using the phrase "he rinses with water," the text uses "he bathes"; and instead of "he undertakes the vow," it says, "having become pure, he receives consecration."

> Water is lightning...and that is why, wherever it passes, it destroys evil...and that is why, when it rains, one must go outside without covering oneself; one says: "May this lightning destroy the evil within me!" (ŚB 7.5.2.41)

One does not handle such a weapon without danger:

> He who brings the waters (into the rite) raises the lightning; but he who raises the lightning without having a stable base cannot lift it, and it completely destroys him. (ŚB 1.1.1.18)

> Thus, this lightning is appeased by reciting the formula: "May the waters here be favorable to me, O goddesses!" And then the lightning, being appeased, does not harm the sacrificer. (ŚB 3.1.2.6)

Their ritual power makes them particularly fearsome to demons:

> The waters are slayers of rakṣas; the rakṣas do not cross the waters; they serve to destroy the rakṣas. (MS 4.1.3)

> The waters are a lightning bolt for destroying the rakṣas. (MS 4.1.4)

As they are a weapon of attack against enemies, they are also a weapon of personal defense:

> One takes running water for protection; everything that exists, without exception—even the wind—comes to rest; but the waters, they do not. (ŚB 3.9.2.5; ŚB 3.9.2.16)

Their harmful power may be logically paired with their beneficence—"the waters are beneficent" (ŚB 3.9.4.16)—since they ward off danger, if one knows how to use them. One of their essential functions is to dispel danger or evil caused by acts that violate the rites:

> The waters are appeasement. (MS 4.5.4; MS 2.1.5; ŚB 1.9.3.2; AB 4.2)

> If the *hotar*, *adhvaryu*, *brahman*, *agnīdhra*, or the sacrificer himself fails in any part of the sacrifice, success is still achieved through the waters. (ŚB 1.1.1.15)

> If there is in the sacrifice anything that remains unresolved or unappeased, water is in any case the appeasement; it is with water, used as appeasement, that one appeases it. (ŚB 12.4.1.5)

> When one digs the earth, one performs an act of violence; water is poured to appease it. (TS 2.6.5.2; TS 6.2.10.3; ŚB 3.3.1.7; TB 1.1.3.1; cf., AB 32.4.2)

> When a king is consecrated, he is made to recite the formula called the *appeasement of the waters*: "Look upon me with a favorable eye, O waters; with a favorable body, touch my body; I invoke all the Agnis who dwell in the waters; place within me your

> brilliance, your strength, your energy!" Thus, if the waters are not appeased, they do not take away the virility of the one who is consecrated. (AB 37.2.9)[40]

The apparent divide between the two domains of Varuṇa—ritual waters and truth—disappears when one analyzes the notion of *satya*. *Satya* is that which possesses existence, the real; truth is only one of its forms:

> The earth is founded on reality; that is why it is reality, for it is the most secure of all worlds. (ŚB 7.4.1.8)

And, "gold is reality" (MS 4.3.1; ŚB 6.7.1.1), the only true metal, and as such, it is also immortality (MS 2.2.2; MS 4.6.6; ŚB 3.8.2.27; ŚB 3.8.3.36; ŚB 5.2.1.20; AB 7.4.5), the only real life; whereas "lead is inexactitude" (MS 2.4.2) because it is not a true metal, being neither iron nor gold, and only resembling them in appearance (ŚB 5.1.2.14; ŚB 4.1.10). Preoccupied exclusively with the sacrifice, the scholars of the Brāhmaṇas had no concern for seeking reality elsewhere. If "the ideal couple is the trust in the sacrifice united with reality" (AB 32.9.4), it is clear that reality here means the exact practice of sacrifice; and in fact, trust is represented by the sacrificer's wife, while the sacrificer himself represents reality. Moreover, it is stated even more clearly:

> Exactitude, reality, is the sacrifice. (MS 1.10.11)

> Reality is nothing other than the triple science. (I.e., the three Vedas of the sacrifice; ŚB 9.5.1.18)

The reality of speech is the sacred science; the sacrosanct syllables (*bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ*, *svaḥ*) are reality (ŚB 2.1.4.10):

> The sacrosanct syllables are the sacred science, are reality, are exactitude. (MS 1.8.5)

> The name of reality is: "sacred science." (ŚB 10.6.3.1)

This is, without doubt, how Hiraṇyadan Baida understood it when he assigned as foundation: "to the waters, reality; to reality, sacred science" (AB 11.6.4). The infernal punishments that Varuṇa shows to Bhrgu are destined for those guilty of having sinned against this reality; all

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[40] "There are three kinds of waters: those of the sky, of the earth, and of the ocean" (MS 3.6.3). "When it is day, night enters into the waters; that is why the waters appear coppery during the day. When it is night, day enters into the waters; that is why the waters appear clear at night" (TS 6.4.2.4; MS 4.5.1). The secret name of the waters is *ādhāvāḥ* (TS 3.3.4.1).

are meant to atone for improperly performed oblations. But this reality, when considered from a less transcendental point of view, can simply mean the factual truth:

> Reality is sight, because reality and sight are one and the same. That is why, if today two people present themselves and say: "I saw it; I heard it," then credence is given to the one who says: "I saw it." (ŚB 1.3.1.27; TB 1.1.4.1-2; MS 3.6.3; AB 1.6.6)

Reality admits no compromise:

> There are two things, not three: reality on one hand, inexactitude on the other. (ŚB 1.1.1.4; ŚB 1.1.2.17; ŚB 3.3.2.2; ŚB 3.9.4.1)

One belongs to the gods, the other to humans:

> Reality is the gods; inexactitude is humanity. (ŚB 1.1.1.4; AB 1.6.6)
>
> The path of the gods is the path of exactitude. (ŚB 4.3.4.16)
>
> What would the gods be, if they committed a transgression? Then they would speak something inexact; but the gods perform only one practice: reality, and that is why their conquest is indestructible. (ŚB 3.4.2.8; ŚB 1.1.1.5)
>
> If one says "yes," while thinking "no," that is a demonic speech which the gods do not love. (AB 6.5.9; AB 9.4.5)

The gods themselves do not refrain from perjury when the occasion arises, and even do so without scruples, being assured in advance that ritual reality will easily atone for the violation of a given word (TS 2.4.1.2). However, since the truthfulness of speech is one form of reality, respect for truth is one of the practices recommended to the sacrificer; it lifts him out of the human world and elevates him above his fellow men, to the rank of the gods. The reality of the spoken words guarantees, through a kind of attraction, the reality of the rewards promised by the rites. But at the same time, as if to further emphasize the moral indifference of the doctrine, the prescription that enjoins truth-telling is strictly limited to the duration of the rite; the ritual provides the formula that releases the sacrificer from his obligation at the end of the ceremony.

> Before undertaking a [ritual] practice, one says: "Now I pass from falsehood to reality." By this formula, one passes from the human world to that of the gods...Then, once the practice is completed, one releases oneself by saying: "Now I am what I am." For indeed, when one undertakes a practice, one becomes, so to speak, a stranger to humanity. It would not be fitting to say: "Now I pass from reality to falsehood." But since one becomes human again, one is released from the observance by saying: "Now I am what I am." (ŚB 1.1.1.4-6; ŚB 1.9.3.23)

However, there is one daily rite that, by its constant recurrence, also implies the continual practice of reality:

> He who tends the sacred fires must not speak falsehood...for his fire is established upon reality. (TB 1.1.4.1-2)

> The true practice of maintaining the sacred fire is reality; he who speaks truth, just as if one were pouring butter on a lit fire, thus makes it shine; its brightness keeps growing ever greater, day by day his fortune grows. And he who speaks falsehoods, as if pouring water on a lit fire, thus weakens it; his state constantly declines; day by day it worsens. Therefore, one must speak only the truth. (ŚB 2.2.19)

But this prescription is not easy to follow:

> Who is the man capable of always telling the truth? (AB 1.6.6).

Even the wisest have recoiled from the gravity of this obligation:

> The parents of Aruṇa Aupaveśi said to him: "You are now old, establish the sacred fires." He replied: "Then tell me to keep silent; for once the fires are established, one must not utter anything untrue." Now, when one speaks, it is impossible to say nothing false. (ŚB 2.2.2.20)

The character of Varuṇa should therefore not be mistaken; if at times he appears to be the guardian of morality, it is solely by virtue of his ritual nature. He is the spirit of the waters of sacrifice, the beneficent waters and the vengeful waters, waters that soothe and waters that strike, waters where the magical power of the rites is fulfilled. A finicky, difficult, unruly divinity, quick to turn against those who invoke him, dangerous to offend, dangerous even to invoke. A name so perilous, capable by its very energy of unleashing countless evils, required a palliative as well. Just as the fierce Rudra, the bringer of tears (TS 1.5.1.1; ŚB 9.1.1.6; ŚB 6.1.3.8), was given names of propitiation and peace to counter the effects of his wild and violent names—and was transformed into Rudra-Śiva (MS 4.2.12; ŚB 1.7.3.8; AB 13.10.6)—so Varuṇa was paired with Mitra, a very vague deity who did not need further definition, for his name sufficed. Mitra means "the friend." When the gods engaged in battle with their most formidable adversary, Vṛtra (whose name appears to be etymologically related to Varuṇa), they urged Mitra to strike the demon as well;

> But he refused, saying: "No; I am the universal friend." The gods' threats eventually persuaded him, but the moment the blow was struck, a cry of disapproval arose: "He, who is the friend, has done harm!" (ŚB 4.1.4.8; MS 4.5.8; TS 6.4.8)

When the world emerged from chaos:

It was Mitra who created the day and Varuṇa who created the night. (TS 6.4.8.3)

The day belongs to Mitra, the night to Varuṇa. (TB 1.7.10.1)

Thus, Mitra's friendly role directly links him to the Iranian Mithra, the solar deity, while the darkness and terrors of the night attest to the malevolence of Varuṇa's works.[41]

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[41] Soma seems to be the exact counterpart of Varuṇa in the plant realm. Like Varuṇa, he is a king; the mere name *rāja* is often used to refer to him. Like Varuṇa, Soma appears under a dual aspect: sometimes as the deified plant, sometimes as the moon. These two aspects, once again, reduce to a single unity. "Soma is the moon, and he is the food of the gods" (e.g., ŚB 1.6.4.5; TB 1.4.10.7; also, MS 2.1.5; AB 32.10.5). Thus, he becomes identified with the sacrifice, which is par excellence the nourishment of the gods. The Soma plant, strictly speaking, is not essentially different from other plants: "Just like the other plants, so was Soma; he performed dazzling austerities, he saw the *sāman* (chant) of Soma, and through that he attained kingship and sovereignty" (TMB 11.3.9). And plants are of a demonic nature; originally, they rose up against Prajāpati, who is the sacrifice. "Prajāpati was the universe in the beginning; the plants climbed upon him, for plants are indeed demonic; they tried to surpass him, and he could not rise above them. He suffered, he burned; then fire was emitted; once emitted, the vigor of the plants passed into him" (MS 1.6.3). Since Soma is a plant, it is not surprising to see him conflated with the most dreadful of demons, Vṛtra. "Indeed, Soma was Vṛtra" (ŚB 3.4.3.13; ŚB 3.9.4.2; ŚB 4.1.4.8; ŚB 4.2.5.15). In the same fashion, the moon, since it too is identical with Soma: "The moon is Vṛtra" (ŚB 1.6.4.13); "Indra made the moon out of the part of Vṛtra that was infused with Soma" (ibid.).

The identity is so complete that in certain stories, during the battle between the gods and demons, the name Soma-rāja alternates with that of Vṛtra. The ŚB 4.1.3.1-14 recounts that after throwing the thunderbolt at Vṛtra, Indra feared he had missed and hid, and none of the gods dared to check if the strike had landed. TS 6.4.7.3 and MS replace Vṛtra with Soma-rāja in the same episode. Moreover, "Vṛtra is the belly" (TS 2.4.12), i.e., the coarse and impure food opposed to the refined nourishment of sacrifice. Before becoming, through the power of formulas, the magical elixir of incomparable energies, Soma juice is merely a human drink, weak or harmful. Before using it, the gods subjected it to prior purification that made it suitable for oblation (ŚB 4.1.2.4). Therefore, Soma is not inherently identical to the moon; he becomes so by transfusion at a fixed time.

The ŚB explains the precise moment the fast should begin: "Some begin fasting (drinking milk) while the moon is still visible. They think: 'Tomorrow it will not rise; yet it is the inexhaustible food of the gods; let us offer it to them now.' That is abundance: before one provision runs out, another is ready. But with this method, one offers not Soma but merely milk, for King Soma is still up there (in the moon). If cows eat mere grass and drink mere water, then only simple milk is produced" (ŚB 1.6.4.14-16). On the contrary, if one waits until the moon completely disappears, the desired phenomenon occurs: "King Soma, food of the gods, who is the moon, in the night when he is seen neither in the east nor the west,

comes into this world and enters the plants and waters. This is the wealth of the gods, their food" (ŚB 1.6.4.5; cf. ŚB 11.1.5.3). Even once Soma becomes fit for ritual operations, he is still ready to reveal his demonic nature. The treatment he is subjected to reveals the terror he inspires. "In truth, Soma is killed when he is pressed" (TS 6.6.7.1; MS 4.7.2; ŚB 3.9.4.2; ŚB 4.3.4.1; AB 13.8.2). Just as, we've seen, the sacrifice is killed when it is offered.

But one must divert the anger of the god being put to death; a simulated transaction averts the danger. Before using the Soma, the priest gives the sacred stalks to a man of low caste who then sells them back for gold. "Whoever sells Soma is evil" (AB 3.1.2); he is the traitor, and upon him must fall the god's wrath and the punishment for murder. Care is also taken to mask the intended murder in the god's eyes: "When Soma is bought, it is bought to reign over the hymns. In truth, Soma is killed when pressed; so one says to him: 'I buy you to rule over the hymns, not to kill you'" (ŚB 3.3.2.6). Brahmanic magic found an ingenious way to spare the god at the expense of the enemy: "[When one is about to strike Soma with the press], one should mentally target one's enemy and say: 'It is him I strike, not you.' For if killing a brahmin, a human being, brings blame, how much more so if one strikes Soma, a god. And yet one kills him when pressing him. But in this way, he is struck, rises again, lives again, and there is no sin. And if one has no enemy, one may mentally target a blade of grass, and then there is no sin" (ŚB 3.9.4.17).

Then Soma receives royal honors. He is placed on a chariot driven by the *subrahmaṇya* priest and drawn by two oxen: "If they are black—or even just one of them—then it will rain" (ŚB 3.3.4.11). A sacrifice is offered in his honor, as for a distinguished guest. "Why is it called the sacrifice of the guest? Because the purchased Soma arrives like a guest. When a king or a brahmin arrives, a great bull or goat is cooked for him; and Soma is the human oblation to the gods; so, the sacrifice of the guest is made for him" (ŚB 3.4.1.2; cf., TS 6.2.1; AB 3.4). "He is raised on a shield borne by four people. Two men bear the shield for a human king; four are needed for him who reigns over the whole universe" (ŚB 3.3.4.26). And thus, the King Soma, through honors, proceeds toward the death that awaits him.

Index

Sanskrit Terms

Akūpārā Āṅgirasī

Agni — relations with Prajāpati; light of men; messenger of the gods to Vāc; has multiple bodies; alone immortal at the origin; conqueror of heaven; outwits the spells of the asuras; messenger of the Aṅgiras to the Ādityas; without splendor at the origin; rival of the gods; chief of the Vasus; king of the gods; attacks the asuras in the form of a horse; spouse of the Waters; *equals* Rudra; incarnated in the five victims

agniṣṭoma

Aṅgiras

Ajīgarta Sauyavasi

Atri

Atharvan

Aditi

anṛta

Antaka

Anvādhyas

Anvāhārya-pacana (fire)

Apsaras

abhiṣecanīya

amṛta

Aruṇa Aupaveśi

Arbuda Kādraveya

Aryaman

Alīkayu Vācaspati

aśraddhā

Aśvapati Kaikeya

aśvamedha

Aśvins

Aṣṭādamṣtra Vairūpa

asura(s) - offspring of Prajāpati; dark; contend with the gods for Vāc; differences between them and the gods; have terror as their attribute; mortal; wars with the gods; ritual errors; magic; Manu and the asuras; oblation to the asuras

Asurī Dīrghajihvī

Asurya

Āktākṣya

ātman (of lndra)

ātmayājin

Āditya - offspring of Prajāpati; see Sun

Ādityas - arrival in heaven; birth; rivalry with the Aṅgiras; take part in the wars of the gods; at the coronation of Indra; guardians of heaven

Ādhāvās - mystical name of the Waters

Āpas – waters; primordial element; creators and creatures of Prajāpati; the Waters and Vāc; *equals amṛta*; *equals śraddhā*; the Waters

and Varuṇa; mothers of gold; foundation of the world

Āptyas

Āpyas

Āruṇi

Āṣādha Sāvayasa

Āṣādhi Sauśromateya

āhavanīya (fire)

Iksvāku

Iṭan Kāvya

Iḍā

Indra - Indra and Prajāpati; creator of animal and plant species; his three bodies; Indra, Kutsa and Luśa; his metamorphoses: falcon for the conquest of the *amṛta*; — jackal for the conquest of the earth; — brahmin for the destruction of the altar of the asuras; chief of the gods; heals the eyes of the sādhyas; birth; without *ojas* at the origin; rival of the gods; chief of the Rudras; — of the Maruts; king of the gods; slayer of Viśvarūpa; Indra and Manu; purifies Akūpārā; Indra and Tvaṣṭar; appeases the *prāśitra*; Indra and Rohita (legend of Śunahśepa); relations with the ṛṣis: Viśvamanas, the Vaikhānasas, Suśravas, Gotama, Vasiṣṭha; Indra and Prāsahā; slaying of Vṛtra.

ukthas

udumbara

Upagu Sauśravasa

upavasatha

upasad

Ula Vārṣṇivṛddha

Uśanas Kāvya

Uṣas

Ūrṇāyu

Ṛbhus

ṛṣis

evaṃvid

ojas

aindra-vāyava

Ka

Kaṇva

Kalyāṇa Āṅgirasa

Kavaṣa Ailūṣa

Kutsa

Kurukṣetra

Kuru-Pañcāla

Kurus

Kustā

Kṛśānu

Keśin Dārbhya - Dālbhya

Kauṣītaki

kṣatra

kṣatriya

Gandharvas

gāyatrī

gārhapatya (fire)

Gotama

Gauśla

Candramas

Caraka

Cailaki

Janaka

Janamejaya Pārikṣita

Jamadagni

Jātukarṇya

jhaṣa

Takṣan

tapas

Tāṇḍya

tānūnaptra

Tṛṣṭa

tejas

triḥ-sāman

Tvaṣṭar

Dakṣa equals Prajāpati; *Pārvati*

dakṣinā

darbha

daśahotar

dākṣāyaṇa (sacrifice); *Dākṣāyaṇas*

Dābhi

dikṣā

Dīrghaśravas

dūrohaṇa

Devabhāga Śrautarṣa

devas – gods; emitted by Prajāpati; sons and fathers of the same; emitted by the Brahman; conquest of Vāc; origin; number; corporeal; suprasensible; truth; immortality; struggles against the asuras; means of victory: protection of Prajāpati; —asceticism; —sacrifice; —falsehood; —battle by wager; defeats; first gods: sādhyas, Ādityas, Aṅgiras; rivalry of the gods; trickery; establishment of monarchy; participation in the sacrifice; how they know the heart of man; hostile to man; pact with Death; opposition of the human and the divine; the gods and the sun; dead gods become the Fathers; faults in the sacrifice; debt toward the gods; difficulties they encounter in the sacrifice; gods and ṛṣis

Devātithi

Daivodāsi Prātardana

Dyaus

dharma

Dhātar

Namuci

Nābhanediṣṭha

nāmarūpa

Nārada

Nṛmedha

Nodhas Kākṣīvata

Naimiṣīyas

pañcarātra

Pathyā Svasti

Parisāraka

Paruchepa

Parvata

pāka (*yajna*)

pāśa

pitaras - means of existence; allies of the gods; poison the plants of the Aṅgiras; participation in the sacrifice; origin, nature, relations with the gods and with men; the south as their region; Śiśu Āṅgirasa and his Fathers

piśācas

punar-mṛtyu

puruṣa

Pūṣan

Paiṅgya

Prajāpati - origin, nature; *equals yajña*, *brahman*, *chandas*, *saṃvatsara*, *puruṣa*, *mṛtyu*, *savitar*, *candramas*, *mahat*, *deva*; *equals* Ka; creation; incest; Prajāpati and Vāc; exhaustion; adversaries; father of the gods and the asuras; author of the sacrifice; victim; ascends first to heaven; *equals* name and form; teaches the gods the rites of immortality; enemy of the asuras; gives himself to the gods —and redeems himself by the sacrifice; consecrates Indra; *equals* manas; first sacrificer; a goat is sacrificed to him; frees the creatures from the knot of Varuṇa

Pratīdarśa Śvaikna

Prāgahi

prāṇa

Prāsahā

Priyamedhā Bharadvāja

Praiyamedhas

Bulila Āśvatarāśvi

bṛhat (sāman)

Bṛhaspati

Brahman - relations with Prajāpati; *equals nāmarūpa*; creates the gods; gives them immortality —and victory; neutralizes the dangerous power of the sacrifice; distributed by the gods; foundation of the world; *equals satya*

Brahma

brāhmaṇa

bhūḥ bhuvaḥ svar

Bhaga

Bharadvāja

Bharata

Bhāllaveya

Bhujyu

Bhṛgu

Makha

madhyama

manas

Manu

mantra

Maruts

Marka

Mitra - Mitra-Varuṇa

Munimaraṇa

Mṛtyu equals Prajāpati: *saṃvatsara*; *equals* Yama; pact with the gods; Mṛtyu Pāpman

Medhātithi

maitrāvaruṇa

mleccha

yajña - seduced by Vāc; etymology; distinguished from the *sattra*

yajñāyajñīya (*sāman*)

Yama

yaśas

Yājñavalkya

Yuktāśva Āṅgirasa

rakṣas – allies of the gods; enemies of the Aṅgiras; the gods; offering to rakṣas; destroyed by the Waters

rathaṃtara (*sāman*)

Rahasyu Devamalimluṅ

rājanya

Rudra - Rudras

Rohita

rauhiṇī

Luśa

vajra

Vatsa

Vatsaprī Bhālandana

Varuṇa – hostile to creatures; chief of the gods; birth; father of Aṅgiras; discovers the *sāman vāmadevya*; rival of the gods; custodian of the bodies of the gods; chief of the Ādityas; Varuṇa and Bhṛgu; and Hariścandra; *equals kṣatra*, Indra; king; physical appearance; the rope as his attribute; author of all evil; god of ritual exactness; god of infernal punishments; offerings proper to Varuṇa; god of the waters

Varutri

Vasiṣṭha

Vasus

Vāc - Vāc and Prajāpati; name; Vāc and Manas; Vāc and the gods; its elements; *equals yajña*

vājapeya

vāmadevya (*sāman*)

vāyavya

Vāyu

vāravantīya (sāman)

Vasiṣṭha Satyahavya

Vidagdha Śākalya

virāj

Vivasvant

Viśvakarman

Viśvamanas

Viśvarūpa

Viśvāvasu

Viśvedevas

Viṣṇu equals yajña; dwarf; beheaded; protector of the poorly performed sacrifice; *viṣṇu-kramās*

vihavya (*sāman*)

vīṇā

Vṛtra – killed by Indra; - by the gods; created by Tvaṣṭar; origin of the *darbha*; *equals udara*

Vaikhānasas

vaiśya

Vaiśvadeva (sacrifice)

Vaiśvānara

Śaṇḍa

Śamyu Bārhaspatya

Śāṇḍilya

Śikhaṇḍin Yājñasena

Śiśu Āṅgirasa

Śunaḥpucha

Śunahśepa

Śunolāṅgūla

Śuṣṇa Dānava

Śyāparṇa Sāyakāyana

Śyāvāśva Ārvanānasa

śraddhā - śraddhādeva

śrama

Śvetaketu

saṃvatsara – see year

sattra

satya - satyavādin

Sarasvatī

Sarvacaru

Savitar

Saharakṣas

sākamedha

sādhya(s)

sāman

Sārvaseni Śauceya

Sindhukṣit

Suparṇa

Suplan Sārñjaya

Sītā Sāvitrī

Sūrya

Sūrya Sāvitrī

Sṛñjayas

Soma - Husband of Sūryā or Sītā Sāvitri; abducted by Vac from the Gandharvas; chief of the gods; holds a *sattra* with the gods; first to attain glory; chief of the Rudras; king of the gods; intoxicates the gods; his swollen eye produces the horse; sacrifice

Saudāsas

sthavira

Sthāṇu

Svarbhānu – see Atri

Svāyava Lātavya

Hariścandra Vaidhasa

Hiraṇyadan Baida

English Terms

ambrosia - see *amṛta*

altar

atmosphere

avatar

barley

bath

births - three

body - mortal and immortal elements; body of the gods; relations between the parts of the body and the sacrifice; new body formed by the *dīkṣā*

boar

bull

buffalo

brahman - creation; gods; what makes the brahman; respect for the brahman

camel

cattle - disputed between the gods and the asuras

cat

celestial dogs

coupling - form of creation; in the rite

confession

confidence - see *śraddhā*

cow - origin; one of the five victims; red cows of Uṣas; horned and hornless cows

creation

darkness

daughter

death - repeated death; punishments and rewards after death; see Mṛtyu

dice

disease - how it is cured

donkey

earth - feet of Prajāpati; see worlds

egg

elephant

embryo

error

eschatology

etymologies

exactness - see *satya*

evil - death

falcon

fathers - see pitaras

fire

fish

flood

gold

goat

gods

horse - sacrifice of the horse

hosts

hunger

incest

language

lotus

magic

man / male - see *puruṣa*

man - born from the mind of Prajāpati; sacrifice to men; relations of man with the gods; his customs contrary to those of the gods; one of the five victims

meal

moon

month

mule

night

ocean

ordeal by weighing

plants

rain

ram

ransom

rice

sacrifice - emitted by Prajāpati; food of the gods; seduces Vāc; disputed between the gods and the asuras; *equals* Prajāpati, Viṣṇu, *yajamāna*, *ṛtvijas*, *puruṣa*; the five sacrifices; it is killed and resurrected by the *dakṣiṇā*; universal principle of life; who may sacrifice; concealed by the gods; imitated

by the gods; leads to heaven; nutritive value; relation between the ceremonies and the fruits of the sacrifice; magical operation; ransom; human sacrifice; victims; divergences concerning the rites; flight of the sacrifice; sacrifice of the ṛṣis

salt

scales

seasons

serpents

silver

sleep

spiders

sun - brightness of the gods; rampart of the gods; disputed between the gods and the asuras; birth; goal of the race of the gods; *equals* death; hesitates between earth and heaven; becomes Varuṇa

suicide

trees - origin; give shelter to Vāc; partisans of the asuras; vengeance of trees cut down non-ritually

truth - see *satya*

turtle

waters

woman

weapons

year

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